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Educating Citizens: George Washington's Proposals for National Education
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Abstract

During his prominent years of public service, George Washington continually advocated two national institutions of higher education. The first, a military academy, came to fruition in 1802 under Thomas Jefferson. The second, a national university, faltered after Washington left the presidency, and has continued in perpetual debate, even up to the beginning of the Twentieth Century.

This paper seeks to reveal, by examination primarily of Washington's correspondence and addresses, the true nature of his conceptions of these two institutions. From this assessment, it is clear that he envisioned both institutions as performing separate functions. The first was to provide the young nation with capable officers, forming the basis of a proficient defense establishment. The second was intended to create competent and knowledgeable citizens for republican government. Despite such differences, both institutions converge in the larger aim of educating citizens and providing for a prosperous and lasting Union.

In addition to an examination of Washington's models for these institutions, this paper examines why his proposals failed during his time of public service, and what developed in their place. A brief comparison of Washington's model of a military academy differs in many ways from the academy founded by Jefferson. While the military academies have arguably become more "Washingtonian" in nature over the years, they would do well, in an era of a controversial "gap" between the military and society, to emphasize Washington's legacy to the military—in a republic, the military must first be citizens, and then soldiers.

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Educating Citizens: George Washington's Proposals for National Education

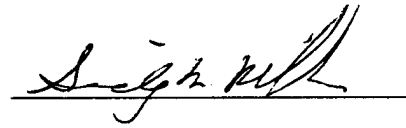
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Matthew Bolden

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I have heretofore proposed to the consideration of Congress, the expediency of establishing a national university, and also a military academy. The desirableness of both these institutions has so constantly increased with every new view I have taken of the subject, that I cannot omit the opportunity of once for all recalling your attention to them.

George Washington to Congress
December 7, 1796

This institution has completed its first hundred years of life. During that century, no other institution in the land has contributed so many names as West Point has contributed to the honor role of the Nation's greatest citizens.

Theodore Roosevelt at USMA Centennial Exercises
June 11, 1902

Introduction

It has been said that, "Over the course of his lifetime—as revolutionary, military leader, and chief executive—Washington's great project, and thus the cornerstone of his statesmanship, was the formation of an independent, national American character."¹ At first glance, this appears an odd statement. For the George Washington we are quick to recognize is the general who led us to victory in the War of Independence, the man who quietly presided over the creation of our Constitution, and the first executive of our infant national government. Even in this lofty resume, there appears to be lacking, at least on the surface, this sentiment of forming a national character, or the way in which Washington embodies such a notion, despite the legends we heard growing up with lessons like that of young Washington and the cherry tree. Along the same lines, we, unlike earlier generations, who were in many ways taught that Washington "was flawless," have heard of some of his faults, such as the observations that, "As a soldier he was capable of rashness and poor judgment . . . He was vain, a bit pretentious, and hot tempered; and though he was a perfect gentleman in public, he was sometimes not one in private."² Still, despite such shortcomings, "No historian doubts that Washington was the indispensable man of his epoch." Indeed, Washington was indispensable, not simply because of the offices he held during the birth of our nation, but as a result of how he conducted himself in those offices, and even more importantly, how he concluded his service. As Matthew Spalding and Patrick Garrity point out:

¹ Matthew Spalding, "Making Citizens: George Washington and the American Character," *Patriot Sage: George Washington and the American Political Tradition*, eds. Gary L. Gregg II and Matthew Spalding (Wilmington: ISI Books, 1999), 222.

² Forest McDonald, "Today's Indispensable Man," *Patriot Sage*, 24.

Washington was the first and last president to be elected unanimously. His departure also marked the first time that an executive freely stepped down to allow the free election of a successor. After the Revolutionary War, General Washington surrendered his commission to Congress and retired from military life at a moment when he could have become—as some hoped—an American monarch. A little over a decade later Washington was voluntarily stepping down from the highest office in the new nation, at a time when he easily could have remained—a prospect many assumed would be the case—for life.³

These are the actions that cemented Washington, in the eyes of his contemporaries, as “First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.”⁴ More importantly, these actions epitomize Washington’s focus on creating a national character, for “He sought to establish the nation—to found a new order of the ages—in the hearts and minds of the people by personifying, defining, and encouraging what he believed ought to be the leading habits and dispositions of this character.”⁵ Washington believed such a national character was necessary for republican government to succeed, for the new nation to prosper, and most importantly, to persevere. By giving America this character, “Washington became more than hero, general, and president; he truly become the Father of his Country.”⁶

Yet, this paper is not about Washington’s accomplishments, vices, or virtues—that work has been done. Instead, this paper concerns two of the means Washington proposed to meet his end of a national character, and ultimately a unified and prosperous nation. Washington’s means to this end are seen in various forms, with his actions and example speaking the loudest, but with his suggestions, guidance, and warnings being no

³ Matthew Spalding and Patrick J. Garrity, *A Sacred Union of Citizens: George Washington’s Farewell Address and the American Character* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 58.

⁴ John Marshall, “Eulogy on Washington: ‘First in the Hearts of His Countrymen,’” Delivered December 26, 1799 by Representative Richard Henry Lee, *Patriot Sage*, 296.

⁵ Matthew Spalding, “Making Citizens: George Washington and the American Character,” *Patriot Sage*, 222.

⁶ *Ibid.*

less important. Among these means, and central to the fulfillment of Washington's goal, lie his proposals for national education. Washington's two proposals for national higher education are the concern of this work, for from his early struggles in the Revolutionary War, to his farewell from the highest office of government, Washington persistently advocated a national military academy and a national university.

Even from the first glance, it seems rational that these two institutions had very distinct missions. Indeed, in Washington's view, they did serve separate purposes. At the same time though, they converge in the context of Washington's larger aim—to forge a nation out of a number of independently minded states and people—to form a republic. True, by the time Washington took office as president, the Constitution was in place and the nation established, but America's soul, its character, and therefore its future was far from solidified or assured. He understood that in order to accomplish this end, to create a Union that would prosper and persevere, each generation of citizens must be educated and prepared for their role in republican government. For unlike the monarchy from which they had broken free, their new mode of governance placed sovereignty, and likewise, responsibility, in their very own hands. Thus, while the first institution was to impart a vital practical skill to the nation's citizens, the second was to create competent and knowledgeable citizens, and perhaps even leaders, out of the young inhabitants of a fledgling nation.

While not all exhibiting such lofty aims, at least on the surface, proposals for both a national military academy and a national university were not uncommon during the first three presidencies of the United States. Even though both institutions were favored by Washington and other prominent figures in American public life, it would not be until the

administration of Thomas Jefferson that the United States Military Academy would be officially founded on March 16, 1802.⁷ Perhaps even more astonishing is that a national university has never been founded, despite the fact that debate, in some form or another, has continued on this subject up to the early Twentieth Century.⁸ Little appears to be written explicitly on the national university proposals themselves during this period. However, in seeking to explain how the military academy came into existence, especially under Jefferson, a man traditionally not known as a proponent of a strong national military, many scholars have suggested that a combination of the military academy and national university concepts made the politics possible.

This paper seeks to reveal, by close examination of Washington's correspondence and addresses, the true nature of his conceptions of these two institutions of national higher education. Existing literature, especially regarding the foundation of West Point, often refers to Washington's advocacy of both schools. However, a detailed analysis of what Washington actually intended for each individual institution is rarely presented concerning both proposals in parallel. Why did these proposals, as Washington enumerated, never come to fruition during his public service? What forces and other actors contributed to Washington's two models for national education? How did the debates considering the militia versus the standing army, the Federalists versus the Republicans, and even the Federalists versus the Anti-Federalists influence these concepts and their fate? Finally, is there more to the story of how these two separate

⁷ Edward S. Holden, "Origins of the United States Military Academy, 1777-1802," *The Centennial of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, 1802-1902*, vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 222. Cited hereafter as *CUSMA*.

⁸ Edgar Bruce Wesley, *Proposed: The National University of the United States* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1936), 3.

ideas for national institutions of higher learning apparently converged, if the traditional thesis of their interaction in the establishment of West Point is accepted? What implications does such a view hold for national education, specifically military education, today?

Ultimately, this is a paper about citizenship. It centers on how Washington viewed the education of citizens necessary for the strengthening, prosperity, and preservation of a republican regime. At the same time, it reveals the often-divergent views of others on what was most essential and most proper for the infant nation. Towards these enumerated ends, the paper begins with the sections presenting Washington's conceptions of first, a national military academy, and second, a national university. After the description of these models, based primarily on Washington's writings and addresses, the fate, and hence failure, of these two proposals during his time of public service is discussed. This work then turns towards the developments concerning these two proposals that took place after Washington, culminating in the eventual establishment of the national military academy in 1802. Finally, the relationship of these two proposals, as well as implications for today, are addressed in the conclusion.

Washington's Conception of a National Military Academy

In order to fully understand George Washington's sentiments regarding the establishment of a national military academy, it is critical to first address his experiences as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. It is from his experiences in the Revolutionary War that Washington formulates his reasons for, and objectives of, a military academy. At the center of this discussion is the longstanding American debate between employing professional soldiers in a standing army or relying on the citizen-

soldiers of state militias. The military force which Washington assumed command of in the summer of 1775 was formed on the concept of a “‘dual army’ . . . that combined a citizen-soldier reserve (the militia), which supplied large numbers of partially trained soldiers, with a small professional force that provided military expertise and staying power.”⁹ This “dual army” was not only necessary due to America’s deep-seated fear of a standing army, but also because of Congress’s realization that a “national regular army” was essential to win the war.¹⁰ However, true to America’s convictions, it was the Continental Army that “complemented rather than supplanted the state militias,” even though “at practically every critical juncture these disparate forces acted in concert.”¹¹ This proved to be an arrangement Washington would lament on several occasions, though for practical purposes, and not a subversion of republican principles.

As Allen Millet and Peter Maslowski point out, Washington, “Like the men he commanded . . . never forgot that he was a citizen first and only secondarily a soldier.”¹² At the same time, a brief overview of his correspondence as Commander of the Continental Army evidences a clear frustration with the organization of the army and conduct of the citizen-soldiers of the militia. It must be remembered though, that he did not take issue with the idea of a militia in principle, but of its performance in practice. A little over a year from assuming command, Washington wrote to the President of Congress “To place any dependence upon Militia, is, assuredly, resting upon a broken

⁹ Allan R. Millet and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 53-4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 58.

staff.”¹³ These militia men were not only “totally unacquainted with every kind of military skill,” but were prone to sickness and a resulting desire to return “to their respective homes.”¹⁴ Ironically, part of the problem Washington saw in the militiamen was a result of the very freedom they were fighting to attain, in that “Men accustomed to unbounded freedom, and no controul, cannot brook the Restraint which is indispensably necessary to the good order and Government of an Army.”¹⁵ In regards to the finances of the army, Washington declares, “Certain I am, that it would be cheaper to keep 50, or 100,000 Men in constant pay than to depend upon half the number, and supply the other half occasionally by Militia.”¹⁶ Washington alludes to the above reasons for his frustration when, six days later, on September 30, 1776, he writes to Lund Washington that he had “assured [Congress] that the longer they delayed raising a standing army, the more difficult and chargeable would they find it to get one, and that, at the same time that the militia would answer no valuable purpose, the frequent calling them in would be attended with an expense, that they could have no conception of.”¹⁷ As the general charged with winning the War for Independence, Washington found himself advocating the type of military force that was the most dependable and competent—a national regular force. Perhaps his greatest challenge was not leading this “dual army” against the superior British force, but convincing a distant and constrained Congress that a national army was the best option to sustain their fledgling republican government.

¹³ George Washington, “To The President Of Congress,” September 24, 1776, *George Washington: A Collection*, comp. and ed. W. B. Allen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988) 77. Cited hereafter as *GW*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 77-8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ George Washington, “To Lund Washington,” September 30, 1776, *GW*, 82.

Washington's frustration with the ill performance of the militia and the lackluster support of Congress continued as the war progressed, especially as he and his men endured a brutal winter in Valley Forge. Near the end of a letter written at Valley Forge to John Bannister, a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress, dated April 21, 1778, General Washington offers two sweeping observations concerning Congress and the war effort; one being the problem of "the indecision of Congress and the delay used in coming to determinations in matters referred to them."¹⁸ The second comment mentions "the *jealousy* with which Congress unhappily entertain of the Army," which "stands upon the common, received Opinion, which under proper limitations is certainly true, that standing Armies are dangerous to a State, and from forming the same conclusion of the component parts of all, though they are totally dissimilar in their Nature."¹⁹ Washington elaborates that most nations have rightly feared standing armies that were composed of mercenaries in times of "*Peace*."²⁰ Yet, for America, "It is our policy to be prejudiced against them in time or *War*; and though they are Citizens having all the Ties, and interests of Citizens, and in most cases property totally unconnected with the Military Line."²¹ While Washington understood the dangers of professional armies composed of mercenaries or a military aristocracy during peacetime, he was perplexed that Congress, and more importantly the States, applied this concern to an army of citizens committed to winning their independence. In his "Circular to the States" in October of 1780, he again declares that, "A moderate compact force on a permanent establishment capable of acquiring the discipline essential to military operations would have been able to make

¹⁸ Ibid., 102.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

head against the enemy without comparison better than the throngs of Militia which at certain periods have been, not in the field, but in their way to and from the Field.”²²

Thus, he adds that “Tis time we should get rid of an error which the experience of all mankind has exploded, and which our own experience has dearly taught us to reject; the carrying on a War with Militia, or, (which is nearly the same thing) temporary levies against a regular, permanent and disciplined force.”²³ He then warns that this “Idea is chimerical” and that, “If we continue in the infatuation, we shall deserve to lose the object we are contending for.”²⁴ Not only did the army need a new and permanent structure, but the government did as well. Much the same, four days later Washington wrote George Mason, declaring that, “If we mean to continue our struggles we must do it upon an entire new plan. We must have a permanent force.”²⁵ Additionally, “Our Civil government must likewise undergo a reform, ample powers must be lodged in Congress as the head of the Federal Union, adequate to all the purposes of War.”²⁶ The Revolution taught Washington that the country needed a military establishment and government able to act with energy in time of crisis. It would be almost nine years till he would serve as the first president of a government exhibiting the latter and responsible for establishing the former.

Closely tied with Washington’s discontent over the performance and expense of the militia, was his frustration with the poor quality of officers the young nation provided. Washington voiced his concern over the predicament early in the war, as seen by his

²² George Washington, “Circular to the States,” October 18, 1780, *GW*, 165.

²³ *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ George Washington, “To George Mason,” October 22, 1780, *GW*, 176.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

letter to Lund Washington on September 30, 1776, in which he confided that, "I am wearied to death all day with a variety of perplexing circumstances—disturbed at the conduct of the militia, whose behavior and want of discipline has done great injury to the other troops, who never had officers, except in a few instances, worth the bread they eat."²⁷ Not even a week earlier, Washington had written to Congress that, "I adduce this Instance to give some Idea to Congress of the Curr. Sentiments and general run of the Officers which compose the present Army; and to shew how exceedingly necessary it is to be careful in the choice of the New Sett, even if it should take double the time to compleat the levies."²⁸ Indeed, "An Army formed of good Officers moves like Clock-work; but there is not Situation upon Earth, less enviable, nor more distressing, than that Person's who is at the head of Troops, who are regardless of Order and discipline; and who are unprovided with almost every necessary."²⁹ In order to get such good officers, which the Continental Army desperately lacked, Washington proposed at the beginning of his letter that, "as the War must be carried on systematically, and to do it, you must have good Officers, there are, in my Judgment, no other possible means to obtain them but by establishing your Army upon a permanent footing; and giving your Officers good pay." Giving the officers "good pay" would "induce Gentlemen, and Men of Character to engage; and till the bulk of your Officers are composed of such persons as are actuated by Principles of honour, and a spirit of enterprise, you have little to expect from them."³⁰ Matthew Spalding argues that one of the primary reasons Washington desired officers of character was to contribute to his "first means of advancing the larger project of making

²⁷ George Washington, "To Lund Washington," September 30, 1776, *GW*, 83.

²⁸ George Washington, "To The President of Congress," September 24, 1776, *GW*, 81.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

seemingly disparate groups into one nation,” by making “the army not just an instrument of war but also a mechanism for demonstrating and transmitting national character.”³¹ Spalding adds that, “Washington’s officer corps played a unique role in this character-building effort. In addition to ensuring the discipline of the army, the officers had the important job of being role models for their soldiers.”³² With the lack of quality native officers, Washington depended on foreign officers such as “Duportail, Kosciusko, Villefranche, L’Enfant of the Engineers; Steuben, Inspector-General,” who “demonstrated the immense value of professional training.”³³ Washington clearly saw the recruitment and education of good officers as central to the military success of the nation. The idea of a national military academy would eventually serve as the cornerstone for initiatives to train a competent officer corps. Additionally, the fact that Washington valued the character of officers is an important observation to keep in mind since, as will be seen shortly, he rarely gave explicit details concerning the course of officer education in his proposed conceptions of a military academy.

By 1783, with the war slowly coming to its formal close, Washington continued offering advice on the structure of the military and character of the newly independent nation. In a letter to Alexander Hamilton on May 2, 1783, Washington offered in detail, his “Sentiments on a Peace Establishment” that contained a plan consisting of four different elements.³⁴ The first three elements consisted of establishing a “regular and standing force” to man the garrisons on the frontier, a “well organized” and uniform

³¹ Matthew Spalding, “Making Citizens: George Washington and the American Character,” *Patriot Sage*, 222.

³² *Ibid.*, 224.

³³ *CUSMA*, 205.

³⁴ George Washington, “Sentiments on a Peace Establishment,” May 2, 1783, *The Writings of George Washington*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, vol. 26 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1938), 374.

militia, and "Arsenals of all kinds of Military Stores."³⁵ The fourth element primarily focused on "Accademies, one or more for the Instruction of the Art Military; particularly those Branches of it which respect Engineering and Artillery, which are highly essential, and the knowledge of which, is most difficult to obtain."³⁶ Before elaborating on the military academy concept, Washington quickly points out, in regard to his first proposal, that "Altho' a *large* standing Army in time of Peace hath ever been considered dangerous to the liberties of a Country, yet a few Troops, under certain circumstances, are not only safe, but indispensably necessary."³⁷ Additionally, as part of his overall view of peacetime military establishment, he states that, "It is likewise much to be wished, that it might be made agreeable to Officers who have served in the Army, to accept Commands in the Militia."³⁸ Thus, the regular army would cultivate professional officers to lead the militia in their local community. For this and other reasons, "an Institution calculated to keep alive and diffuse the knowledge of the Military Art would be highly expedient."³⁹ However, since Washington felt that detailed plans for the arrangement of such an institution was better left in the hands of those "being more competent, to the decision that I can pretend to be," he offers only "concise" comments relating to this subject.⁴⁰ As part of these observations, he asserts that, "Until a more perfect system of Education can be adopted, I would propose that Provision should be made at some Post or Posts . . . for instructing a certain number of young Gentlemen in the Theory of the Art of War, particularly in all those branches of service which belong to the Artillery and Engineering

³⁵ Ibid., 374-5.

³⁶ Ibid., 375.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 394.

³⁹ Ibid., 396.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Departments.”⁴¹ This education would not only provide the nation with competent artillerymen and engineers, but would also make for “more accomplished and capable” officers in the “Infantry or any other Corps whatsoever.”⁴² In sum, Washington warns that, “unless we intend to let the Science become extinct, and to depend entirely upon the Foreigners for their friendly aid, if ever we should again be involved in Hostility,” the aforementioned institution must be completed, for “a Corps of able Engineers and expert Artillerists cannot be raised in a day.”⁴³ Thus, Washington’s proposal for a military academy ultimately rests on his desire to provide a strong and capable, yet safe for republican government, military establishment that will ensure the safety of the infant Union. His words in the “Circular to the States,” that the militia “must be considered as the Palladium of our security, and the first effectual resort in the case of hostility,” echo that very sentiment.⁴⁴ As will be addressed later, this concern for the continuance of the Union is not only at the heart of Washington’s military academy proposals, but also his conceptions of another national institution of higher learning, the national university.

After the Revolution and his suggestions voiced in 1783, Washington apparently remained fairly quiet concerning his sentiments towards the military establishment and a military academy until he was elected to the Presidency. Throughout his eight annual messages to Congress, he retains a common thread of concern for the preservation and strengthening of the Union and a provision for an adequate and proper defense. Indeed, in his “First Annual Message,” delivered in January, 1790, less than a year after his inauguration, he declares to Congress that providing “for the common defence will merit

⁴¹ Ibid., 396-7.

⁴² Ibid., 397.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ George Washington, “Circular to the States,” June 14, 1783, *GW*, 247.

particular regard” during their term, for “To be prepared for war, is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.”⁴⁵ He adds that, “Free people ought not only to be armed, but disciplined; to which end, a uniform and well digested plan is requisite.”⁴⁶ This sentiment of the importance of the militia and training of the people is carried through the plan for the military establishment presented by Henry Knox, Washington’s Secretary of War, only ten days latter. By the time of his “Second Annual Address,” eleven months latter, France was in turmoil from the revolution and the problems with Indian skirmishes on the frontiers were continuing.⁴⁷ In light of these circumstances, Washington reminds Congress: “we should not overlook the tendency of a war, and even of preparations for war, among the nations most concerned in active commerce with this country.”⁴⁸ By the time of his “Third Annual Message,” in October of 1791, the Kentucky militia had already been used in combat against the Indians.⁴⁹ Once again, Washington emphasizes the importance of a strong military establishment by claiming that, “The safety of the United States, under divine protection, ought to rest on the basis of the systematic and solid arrangements; exposed as little as possible to the hazards of fortuitous circumstances.”⁵⁰ While plans were presented for the formation of a uniform and strong militia, Washington felt the young nation was still lacking in its defense provisions. As will soon be seen, a military academy was an important element of the military establishment Washington envisioned.

⁴⁵ George Washington, “First Annual Message,” January 8, 1790, *GW*, 468.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ George Washington, “Second Annual Message,” December 8, 1790, *GW*, 471-2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 472.

⁴⁹ George Washington, “Third Annual Message,” October 25, 1791, *GW*, 475.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 479.

As Washington entered his second term in office, both external and internal circumstances continued to point towards the need for an energetic defense establishment. In his "Fifth Annual Message," after Washington mentions that war in Europe has begun, he forcefully states that, "There is a rank due to the United States, among nations, which will be withheld, if not absolutely lost, by the reputation of weakness. If we desire to avoid insult, we must be able to repel it; if we desire to secure peace . . . it must be known that we are at all times ready for war."⁵¹ He adds that such arrangements for the defense must not be looked down upon by those who love republican government, for such arrangements for the defense "are incapable of abuse in the hands of the militia, who ought to possess a pride in being the depository of the force of the republic, and may be trained to a degree of energy, equal to every military exigency of the United States."⁵² Thus Washington sees a uniform, well trained, and national militia as a security to republican government, not a threat. Likewise, almost a year later, Washington, describing the events concerning the suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion to Congress, utters that it was a great "spectacle, displaying to the highest advantage the value of republican government, to behold the most and least wealthy of our citizens standing in the same ranks, as private soldiers, pre-eminently distinguished by being the army of the constitution."⁵³ Here, it should be noted, is additional evidence that Washington in no way desired to create a professional military establishment that would form a military aristocracy, a fear Republicans would later associate with the

⁵¹ George Washington, "Fifth Annual Message," December 3, 1793, *GW*, 488.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 489.

⁵³ George Washington, "Sixth Annual Message," November 19, 1794, *GW*, 496.

Federalist military establishment under Adams.⁵⁴ Moreover, he urges Congress to devise and establish a “well regulated militia,” for it is his hope that this “present session will not pass, without carrying, to its full energy, the power of organizing, arming, and disciplining, the militia; and thus providing, in the language of the constitution, for calling them forth to execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrections, and repel invasions.”⁵⁵ In a fitting conclusion to his remarks to Congress on this subject, near the end of his final message to Congress in December of 1796, Washington asserts that, “My solicitude to see the militia of the United States placed on an efficient establishment, has been so often and so ardently expressed, that I shall but barely recall the subject to your view on the present occasion; at the same time that I shall submit to your inquiry, whether our harbors are yet sufficiently secured?”⁵⁶ The Father of the infant nation realized it required a ready defense that would also respect and nurture its republican government. As it turns out, he saw a military academy as integral to that plan.

Much like his correspondence and addresses during the Revolution, Washington’s references to the military academy during his presidency are few and unspecific. The first of these references, in his “Fifth Annual Message,” is more of an allusion to an academy, as he speaks to Congress of the improvements they might deem necessary in the military establishment and suggests that they decide “whether a material feature, in an improvement of it, ought not to be, to afford an opportunity for the study of those

⁵⁴ This latter sentiment will be discussed later in the paper, and is evidenced mainly in Theodore Crackel’s work, *Mr. Jefferson’s Army: Political and Social Reform of the Military Establishment, 1801-1809* (New York: New York University Press, 1987).

⁵⁵ George Washington, “Sixth Annual Message,” November 19, 1794, *GW*, 497.

⁵⁶ George Washington, “Eighth Annual Message,” December 7, 1796, *GW*, 511-2.

branches of the military art which can scarcely ever be attained by practice alone.”⁵⁷ This is most assuredly a reference to the military arts of engineering and artillery, which he emphasized, took much more effort to train in his “Sentiments on a Peace Establishment.”⁵⁸ In his “Eighth Annual Message,” Washington enumerates his reasons for his continual suggestions of a military academy. He also presents his reasoning for his other proposed national institution of education, as he states that, “I have heretofore proposed to the consideration of Congress, the expediency of establishing a national university, and also a military academy.”⁵⁹ He continues that the military academy is “recommended by cogent reasons.”⁶⁰ Among the rationale is the fact that no matter how “pacific the general policy of a nation may be, it ought never to be without an adequate stock of military knowledge for emergencies.”⁶¹ For a nation to be without this knowledge, would “impair the energy of its character, and both would hazard its safety, or expose it to greater evils when war could not be avoided.”⁶² Further, “In proportion as the observance of pacific maxims might exempt a nation from the necessity of practicing the rules of the military art, ought to be its care in preserving and transmitting, by proper establishments, the knowledge of that art.”⁶³ Since this “art of war is at once comprehensive and complicated” and “demands much previous study,” it “ought to be a serious care of every government; and for this purpose an academy, where a regular course of instruction is given, is an obvious expedient, which different nations have

⁵⁷ George Washington, “Fifth Annual Message,” December 3, 1793, *GW*, 489.

⁵⁸ George Washington, “Sentiments on a Peace Establishment,” May 2, 1783, Fitzpatrick, 397.

⁵⁹ George Washington, “Eighth Annual Message,” December 7, 1796, *GW*, 509.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 510.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

successfully employed.”⁶⁴ From these reasons, it is clear that Washington’s rationale for a competent military establishment is closely related to that for a national military academy. Both would contribute to making sure the nation was fit for any conflict, thereby increasing the national prosperity, and all the while providing no threat to republican government.

While Washington himself never explicitly listed the elements he felt should be included in a military academy education, several other key actors at the time were more specific. This paper will not go into detail concerning all of their notions of an academy, but some of their ideas and writings are worth mentioning, especially with their close connections and correspondence with Washington on this very subject. In his “Sentiments on a Peace Establishment,” Washington mentions that he had reviewed Baron Steuben’s notions of a military academy that were submitted to the same committee in which his writings were intended.⁶⁵ Feeling little need to go into detail with his own plans, it is safe to say that Washington at least agreed in part with Steuben’s plan, as he did not bother to rebut any of his proposals. In his plan, Steuben states that:

All cadets were to be instructed in natural philosophy, eloquence and belles-lettres, civil and international law, history and geography, mathematics, civil architecture, drawing, French, horsemanship, fencing, dancing, and music; and artillery and engineer Cadets were to receive further and special instruction.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ George Washington, “Sentiments on a Peace Establishment,” May 7, 1783, Fitzpatrick, 396.

⁶⁶ Baron Steuben, April, 1783, quoted in *CUSMA*, 206.

Samuel Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language*, identifies “Belles Lettres” as a French term and defines it simply as “Polite literature” (2Y2V, CD-ROM version). *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, 3^d ed., defines “belles lettres” as either “Literature regarded for its aesthetic value rather than its didactic or informative content” or “Light, stylish writings, usu. on literary or intellectual subjects” (125). As will be seen, this is an element of the liberal education that Washington includes quite often in his writings concerning the national university.

This curriculum not only evidences a balance between liberal and technical education, but also distinguishes between the training of artillerists and engineers from that of other officers. Indeed, Steuben intended that, "No person was to be commissioned in the Army who was not a graduate of one of the military academies (unless he had served as an officer in the Revolutionary war)."⁶⁷ If nothing else, this proposal gives insight into what the man who Washington assigned to drill the regular army during the Revolutionary War thought was necessary to train the future officers of the nation's military. Taken further, if Washington agreed with these sentiments, as is quite probable, the implications for his conception of military academy education consists of classical or liberal as well as technical instruction.

Perhaps the two most influential confidants of Washington in regards to the military academy proposals and the military establishment as a whole were Henry Knox and Alexander Hamilton. One of the most noted examples, though more famous for Thomas Jefferson's opposition than for Knox and Hamilton's support, of their agreement with Washington's desire for a military academy came to light during a series of November 1793 cabinet meetings, where Washington's content for his "Fifth Annual Message" to Congress was discussed.⁶⁸ When "It was proposed to recommend the establishment of a military academy," during the first of these two meetings, Jefferson "objected that none of the specified powers given by the Constitution to Congress, would

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), 10; George S. Pappas, *To The Point: The United States Military Academy, 1802-1902* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), 10.

authorize this.”⁶⁹ Knox was for the proposition, Randolph “said nothing” to it, and Washington stated, “Though it would be a good thing, he did not wish to bring on anything which might generate heat and ill humor.”⁷⁰ Indeed, Washington had many other concerns stemming from brewing partisan conflicts over the French Revolution, and most likely felt that adding to such passions with this issue was not worth the cost.⁷¹ Yet five days later, at another cabinet meeting, Randolph presented a draft of Washington’s speech, which included the recommendation for a military academy.⁷² Jefferson opposed it once again, adhering to his earlier rationale, while “Hamilton and Knox approved it without discussion.”⁷³ This time Randolph explicitly supported the recommendation, “saying that the words of the Constitution authorizing Congress to lay taxes, &c., *for the common defence*, might comprehend it.”⁷⁴ Washington then declared a more forceful position than the one he evidenced just days prior, stating this time that, “he would not choose to recommend anything against the Constitution, but if it was *doubtful*, he was so impressed with the necessity of this measure, that he would refer it to Congress, and let them decide for themselves whether the Constitutions authorized it or not.”⁷⁵ As was shown earlier, Washington’s “Fifth Annual Message” did indeed allude to a military academy, and once again, he left the details surrounding the establishment of such a school to other political actors.

⁶⁹ Thomas Jefferson, “The Anas,” *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Albert E. Bergh, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1905), 409.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 409-10.

⁷¹ Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 88. This reference noted for centrality of the French Revolution to partisan conflict of the time; inference to Washington is from the author.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 410.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 410-1.

Long before serving in Washington's cabinet, Knox, as Chief of Artillery under Washington in the Revolutionary War, acted as a proponent of a military academy, as he wrote to John Adams in May of 1776 "in regard to establishing academies for educating young gentlemen in every branch of military art."⁷⁶ During a frustrating beginning to the War, Knox continued his cries for officer education, writing to his brother that, "We ought to have academies in which the whole theory of the art of war shall be taught."⁷⁷ He penned to Adams again, declaring, "Military academies must be instituted at any expense. We are fighting against a people well acquainted with the theory and practice of war, brave by discipline and habit."⁷⁸ In reporting to a Continental Congress Committee in September of 1776, Knox gave a detailed opinion:

And as officers can never act with confidence until they are masters of their profession, an Academy established on a liberal plan would be of the utmost service to the Continent, where the whole theory and practice of fortification and gunnery should be taught; to be nearly on the same plan as that at Woolwich, making allowance for the different circumstances; a place where our enemies are indebted for the superiority of their artillery to all who have opposed them.⁷⁹

Giving some credence to the suggestions offered them, Congress appointed another committee "to prepare and bring in a plan of a Military Academy at the Army," but unfortunately, "there is no indication that such a plan was ever submitted."⁸⁰ Even so, Knox did manage in "the winter of 1778 to establish "an academy where lectures are read in tactics and gunnery" in Pluckemin, N.J., where he was camped with the

⁷⁶ *CUSMA*, 201.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Pappas, 5-6. The school Knox refers to as "Woolwich" is the "Royal Military Academy at Woolwich," founded in 1741. It was designed to prepare British cadets "for service in the engineers and artillery," and "emphasized algebra, geometry, fortification, mining, gunnery, and bridge building" (Ambrose, 5).

⁸⁰ Pappas, 6.

artillery.⁸¹ Still, this schooling in no way resembled the scale of Woolwich. Knox, like Washington and the other Revolutionary proponents, would have to wait for future opportunities to institute the officer education they felt proper. According to Knox, a large part of such an education involved the practical military skills of artillery and engineering, taught on an extensive, or “liberal,” scale.

Far removed from the battlefields of the Revolutionary War, Knox again received his chance to influence the educational structure of the military establishment as Secretary of War under the Confederation, and more importantly, Washington. In January 1790, Knox submitted to the President and Congress a “Plan for the General Arrangement of the Militia of the United States,” which contained the administration’s policy for the new nation’s military establishment.⁸² While this plan does not deal directly with the idea of a military academy, it lends insight to Knox’s, and therefore Washington’s views on both the broad and educational role of the military establishment in a republic. The plan emphatically states that, “An energetic National Militia is to be regarded as the CAPITAL SECURITY of a free republic; and not a standing army, forming a distinct class in the community.”⁸³ It must be noted though, that this plan did not involve a militia as relied upon in the Revolutionary War. Rather, it established a three-tiered militia, organized in the states, but trained according uniform regulations given by the federal government, and able to be called into action by both.⁸⁴ Regarding

⁸¹ *CUSMA*, 203-4.

⁸² U.S. War Department, “A Plan for the General Arrangement of the Militia of the United States,” Published by Order of the House of Representatives (New York: Childs & Swaine, 1790). This document is a slight revision of the “Plan for the General Arrangement of the Militia” that Knox submitted as Secretary of War under the Confederation on March 18, 1786. In the cover letter to Washington, Knox states that he “modified” the original plan “according to the alterations you were pleased to suggest.”

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 9, 12.

the “discussions on the subject of a powerful militia,” Knox saw only two options:

“Either efficient institutions must be established for the military education of the youth; and that knowledge acquired therein shall be diffused throughout the community, by the means of rotation,” or “the militia must be formed of substitutes, after the manner of the militia of Great Britain.”⁸⁵ It is from the first option that, “A glorious national spirit will be introduced, with its extensive train of political consequences. The youth will imbibe a love of their country; reverence and obedience to its laws; courage and elevation of mind; openness and liberality of character; accompanied by a just spirit of honor.”⁸⁶ In essence, this military education will help produce good citizens. Although this plan does not explicitly reference a military academy for officer education, it does refer to the initial military training, or “education,” that both enlisted and officers must receive.⁸⁷

Regardless, it is the benefits of a basic military education that Knox perceives, along with Washington’s approval of the plan that are important.⁸⁸ In their view, military education not only prepares one to defend the republic, but also imbibes in them the virtues and principles most desirable for everyday citizens of such a nation.

Whereas it may appear that Hamilton was less vocal than Knox concerning his desire for a national military academy during the Revolutionary War, his support for such an institution not only continued as a member of Washington’s cabinet, as mentioned earlier, but even heightened near the end of Washington’s life. It should not be overlooked though, that Hamilton served as the chairman of the committee that

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 14. In addition to the basic military training, each “legion,” as the fundamental unit of this militia system, was instructed to have a chaplain that “should impress on the minds of the youth, at stated periods, in concise discourses, the eminent advantages of free governments to the happiness of society, and that such governments can only be supported by the knowledge, spirit, and virtuous conduct of the youth” (16).

⁸⁸ *CUSMA*, 209.

“reviewed the problem” of “determining what permanent military establishment was necessary” at the conclusion of the Revolution.⁸⁹ This is the committee from which originated the Washington’s aforementioned “Sentiments on a Peace Establishment,” and recommended a military academy, among other notions.⁹⁰ During Washington’s presidency, Hamilton’s desire for a military academy is also seen in the preparation of some of Washington’s speeches, as evidenced by his first draft of the President’s “Eighth Annual Message” recommending such an institution.⁹¹ Yet, it was not until the end of Washington’s life that Hamilton presented him with his most comprehensive plan for a national military academy. On November 28, 1799, Hamilton sent Washington “a copy of a letter which I have written to the Secretary of War on the subject of a military academy” and added that, “Any alterations in the plan which you may do me the honor to suggest will receive the most careful attention.”⁹² In the letter to Secretary of War McHenry, Hamilton notes how he has “always thought” a “military academy” to be of “primary importance,” and that while “This object has repeatedly engaged the favorable attention of the administration, and some steps towards it have been taken . . . these, as yet, are very inadequate.”⁹³ This new plan proposed not only a military academy, but a system of academies consisting of a Fundamental School, School of Engineers and Artillerists, School of Calvary, School of Infantry, and School of the Navy.⁹⁴ Cadets

⁸⁹ Pappas, 8.

⁹⁰ As Pappas points out, this committee also relied heavily on the recommendations of Steuben, which were quite similar to Washington’s (8). This committee’s inquiries originated the dialogue between Washington and Steuben concerning Steuben’s plan for a military academy, as discussed earlier (*CUSMA*, 205-6).

⁹¹ *CUSMA*, 214.

⁹² Alexander Hamilton, “Hamilton to Washington,” November 28, 1799, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. John C. Hamilton, vol. 5 (New York: Charles S. Francis & Company, 1851), 383-4.

⁹³ Alexander Hamilton, “Hamilton to McHenry,” November 23, 1799, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, 378.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 379.

would study at the “Fundamental School” for two years, being instructed in “Arithmetic, algebra, geometry, the laws of motion, mechanics, geography, topography and surveying, designing of structures and landscapes” and “The principles of tactics,” before being sent to the respective finishing school for their branch of service.⁹⁵ The curriculum for the “School of Engineers and Artillerists” consisted chiefly of science and engineering principles combined with their practical application in the military arts.⁹⁶ Edward Holden comments in West Point’s *Centennial* history that this plan is essentially “the plan of Knox—an academy like Woolwich—elaborated by Hamilton.”⁹⁷ In effect, this plan is, “In its essentials . . . the scheme of military education of the whole American Army for the century 1802-1902.”⁹⁸ Its importance here though, is in its author’s relationship with Washington, for surely Hamilton knew Washington would at least agree with it in principle when soliciting his most respected advice on the elements of such a plan.

It is from Hamilton’s plan for an academy system that the last clue into George Washington’s conception of a national military academy is evident. In his reply to Hamilton’s letter in November of 1799, Washington pens that, “The establishment of an Institution of this kind, upon a respectable and extensive Basis, has ever been considered by me as an object of primary importance to this country.”⁹⁹ While he “omitted no proper opportunity for recommending it . . . to the attention of the Legislature,” he “never undertook to go into detail of the Organization of such an Academy, leaving this task to other whose pursuits in the paths of Science, and attention to the arrangements of such

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 380-1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 380.

⁹⁷ *CUSMA*, 217.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ George Washington, Letter to Alexander Hamilton, December 12, 1799, quoted in *CUSMA*, 215. This turned out to be Washington’s last letter written before his death (215).

Institutions, had better qualified them for the execution of it.”¹⁰⁰ It is for this reason, Washington asserts, “I must now decline making any observations on the details of your plan; and as it has already been submitted to the Secretary of War, through whom it would naturally be laid before Congress, it might be too late for alterations if any should be suggested.”¹⁰¹ Thus, Washington’s last letter with insight into his conceptions for a military academy is much the same as his previous letters and addresses, leaving the specifics of the institution up to those he felt better qualified and in the position to take action.

Before concluding this section, it is important to note this habit of Washington’s of declining to enumerate specific recommendations on an academy organization or curriculum, at least during his presidency, fits with his larger view of the executive role. As Robert Johnstone points out, “Washington never believed it to be a proper function of the president to influence legislative debates.”¹⁰² Johnstone adds that, “The presidency, despite the obligation to recommend measures and the right to veto, was not seen as an integral part of the legislative process, nor was Washington prepared to argue that the executive possessed, or could possess, any relationship to the people more special or more direct than that which was enjoyed by the members of Congress.”¹⁰³ This view relates not only to how Washington presented his proposals for the military academy, but as will be seen shortly, it affected his proposals for the national university as well, albeit to a lesser extent.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Robert M. Johnstone, Jr., *Jefferson and the Presidency: Leadership in the Young Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 55.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Washington clearly saw a national military academy as critical to the health and prosperity of the Union, as he did a healthy military establishment. Yes, the skills of engineers and artillerists should be taught there, but it also appears that the general education of officers had its place as well. What Washington specifically had in mind in his frequent references to training in the "military art" would shed considerable light on the question of whether Washington saw an academy as only teaching the practical or technical skills required of officers, or whether more general principles of a liberal education should be present to mold character and help make citizens. A definitive answer to this question is not clear from these writings and addresses, but it appears that elements of both were present in Washington's conception of officer education. From the evidence presented, there is reason to suspect he believed basic military training would indeed contribute to the making of good citizens, but there is no reason to proclaim that he saw this training as absolutely necessary for the same end. The one thing that is sure is that Washington saw an "extensive" military academy as critical to make citizens not just into competent soldiers, but skilled officers. Only with such men of expertise, and even more importantly, character, could the armies of the United States, whether militia or regular, be trusted to protect her infant borders.

Washington's Conception of a National University

Unlike his lack of specific details concerning the establishment of a national military academy, Washington enumerated on several occasions his reasons, purposes, and insights on the structure for the other institution of higher education he envisioned, the national university. In many ways, Washington took a much more active investment in this proposal, which makes it all the more ironic that the military academy, and not the

national university, was founded only three years after his death. The national university concept, on the other hand, has resurfaced in perpetual debate, to no avail, up through the beginning of the twentieth century. An examination of Washington's works relating to the national university concept, and some of the influential factors concerning this institution before Washington, give insight into the reasons he favored such an establishment and clues to the politics that would weigh on his proposals.

While Washington's support of the formation of a national university surely lent credibility to the concept, he was not the originator of the idea. In his work, *Proposed: The University if the United States*, Edgar Wesley adds in a footnote that, "It is certain that the idea of a national university was widely current in 1786. Samuel Blodget claims to have suggested it to Washington in 1775. The actual originator will probably never be known."¹⁰⁴ Wesley points out though, that the "first well-known proposal for the establishment of a national university was made in 1787 by Dr. Benjamin Rush of Pennsylvania, an eminent physician who had served as surgeon-general during the Revolutionary War."¹⁰⁵ In fact, Rush was not only a physician, but also a "signer of the

¹⁰⁴ Wesley, 3.

In his essay, "The Origin of the National Scientific and Educational Institutions of the United States," G. Brown Goode discusses and quotes some of Samuel Blodget's views in his work, *Economica* (1806), concerning Washington and the national university (64-5). In his book, Blodget states that after he mentioned his idea of establishing a national university to Washington during the War in October of 1775, "Washington immediately replied, 'Young man, you are a prophet, inspired to speak what I am confident will one day be realized'" (*Economica*, 22, quoted in Goode, 64). Blodget adds, regarding this conversation, that, "The look of General Washington, the energy of his mind, his noble and irresistible eloquence, all conspired so far to impress the writer with these subjects, that if ever he should unfortunately become insane it will be from his anxiety for the federal city and national university" (*Economica*, 22, quoted in Goode, 64). While Wesley's skepticism of these claims is probably tied in with his view of *Economica* as an "a strange book," they may carry some truth, especially given Washington's desire to unite and strengthen the nation (9). Blodget would later raise the national university idea with Congress in 1803 and 1805, but to no avail (Wesley, 9). Goode's essay is published in the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1889* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890), 53-161.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Declaration of Independence . . . a prolific writer on political and social questions, a founder of several colleges, and an aggressive promotor of social reforms.”¹⁰⁶ Rush’s proposal warrants closer examination, for several of its elements are evident in Washington’s conceptions of the institution.

Dr. Rush’s address of 1787, labeled “To the People of the United States,” centers on his notion that, “The American war is over: but this is far from being the case with the American revolution . . . nothing but the first act of the great drama is closed.”¹⁰⁷ Rush continues that, “It remains yet to establish and perfect our new forms of government; and to prepare the principles, morals, and manners of our citizens, for these forms of government, after they are established and brought to perfection.”¹⁰⁸ As a measure to prepare citizens according to the former sentiment, Rush argues, “knowledge of every kind should be disseminated through every part of the United States.”¹⁰⁹ To accomplish this goal, Congress should establish a “federal university” instead of spending three times as much to build a “federal town.”¹¹⁰ At such a university, “let every thing connected with government, such as history—the law of nature and nations—the civil law—the municipal laws of our country—and the principles of commerce—be taught by competent professors.”¹¹¹ In addition, Rush includes the military in the curriculum for this institution by proposing that, “masters be employed, likewise, to teach gunnery—

¹⁰⁶ Michael Meranze, ed., introduction to *Essays: Literary, Moral and Philosophical*, by Benjamin Rush (Schenectady, NY: Union College Press, 1988), i.

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin Rush, “Address to the People of the United States,” 1787, *Republication of the Principles and Acts of the Revolution in America*, Hezekiah Niles (New York: A. S. Barnes & Company, 1876), 234.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

fortification—and every thing connected with defensive and offensive war.”¹¹² Hence is a proposal for a federal institution of higher education that includes elements of the both the civilian national university and military academy concepts. It is noteworthy that no other such proposal combining the two educational concepts appears to have been made, even by Washington himself. Rush also adds that a professor of “what is called in the European universities, economy” should be included to “unfold the principles and practice of agriculture and manufacture of all kind.”¹¹³ However, unlike Washington, Rush sees this university as a type of graduate school where “young men should be encouraged to repair, after completing their academical studies in the colleges of their respective states.”¹¹⁴ In concluding his remarks on this subject, he declares that, “The honors and offices of the United States should, after a while, be confined to persons who had imbibed federal and republican ideas in this university.”¹¹⁵ Whereas Washington’s conception of the national university consists of an undergraduate institution and does not include any type of military education, his proposals coincide with Rush’s in regard to the role the university plays in preparing citizens for republican government. Ultimately, educating competent citizens and possibly even future leaders is at the center of both men’s reasoning for such a national educational institution. Likewise, the curriculum they see necessary to prepare citizens for this government is much the same.

A year after Rush’s address, another plan advocating a national university appeared in the pages of the *Massachusetts Centinel*, penned by “a Private Citizen of

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Pennsylvania.”¹¹⁶ Goode mentions earlier in his essay that while it is possible to suggest that Madison was the author, “It is more probable, however, that the writer was Benjamin Rush.”¹¹⁷ This analysis appears sound, for much like Rush’s address, this plan emphasizes the need for the people to be “prepared for our new form of government, by an education adapted to the new and peculiar situation of our country.”¹¹⁸ A Federal University, designed as a graduate school, would provide such an education, which taught “The principles and forms of government applied in a particular manner to the explanation of every part of the Constitution and laws of the United States.”¹¹⁹ Following this in the list of subjects are history, agriculture, the “principles and practice of manufactures,” commerce, mathematics (particularly as applied to finance and “the principles and practice of war”), “natural philosophy and chemistry,” natural history, philology (including “rhetoric and criticism, lectures,” etc.), German and French, and “All those athletick and manly exercises.”¹²⁰ This list does indeed cover the ground of a “whole-person” concept of education, and is in many ways similar to Rush’s earlier address, and as will be seen, Washington’s proposals. Its greatest similarity though, is in its notion that such an education will provide “the youth of America” with “those branches of knowledge which increase the convenience of life, lessen human misery, improve our country, promote population, exalt the human understanding, and establish domestick, social, and political happiness.”¹²¹ The youth educated in such an institution would then spread “their knowledge and principles through every county, town, and

¹¹⁶ “Plan of a Federal University,” from the *Pennsylvania Gazette* 1788, quoted in the *Massachusetts Centinel*, Saturday, Nov. 19, 1788, from Goode, Appendix A, 126, 129.

¹¹⁷ Goode, 66.

¹¹⁸ “Plan of a Federal University,” from Goode, Appendix A, 126.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 127-8.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

village of the United States.”¹²² While it is not known how familiar Washington was with these documents, their fundamental principles share many commonalities with his underlying rationale for such an extensive liberal education and the institution from which this education would spring forth.

Besides Rush’s address and the subsequent plan attributed to him, the other key event that gave credence to the national university concept was its surfacing in the debates of the Constitutional Convention. Indeed, as Wesley states, “In the years preceding the inauguration of Washington the national university was repeatedly discussed in the newspapers and was a frequent topic of conversation.”¹²³ Additionally, “it is evident from Dr. Rush’s ‘Address’ that the idea was not original with him. He simply gave expression to a current idea, and his reputation gave it status and momentum.”¹²⁴ This sentiment surfaced in the constitutional debates on September 14, 1787, when James Madison and Charles Pinkney “moved to insert in the list of powers vested in Congress a power—‘to establish an University, in which no preferences or distinctions should be allowed on account of Religion.’”¹²⁵ Gouverneur Morris disagreed with this motion, claiming that, “It is not necessary. The exclusive power at the Seat of Government, will reach the object.”¹²⁶ The measure was then narrowly defeated.¹²⁷ Wesley is quick to point out, though, that, “No one is on record, however, as opposing the university or questioning the power of Congress to establish it. The issue turned wholly upon the question of the necessity of making an explicit grant. Such a grant was

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Wesley, 4.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ James Madison, *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 639.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

regarded as unnecessary.”¹²⁸ Despite the fact that no specific objections were registered during the Convention in regards to the constitutionality of such an institution, critics would raise this very issue for years to come.¹²⁹ Regardless, the national university concept would have to wait three more years before it was proposed before Congress, and then in the form of a recommendation, not a formal motion.

Washington’s first public mention of the national university, while lacking in specifics, is rich in the broad benefits of education for the citizens of a republic, perhaps the most central element to his reasoning for this specific institution. In his “First Annual Message,” on January 8, 1790, he asserts that he is confident Congress will agree with him that “there is nothing which can better deserve your patronage, than the promotion of science and literature. Knowledge is, in every country, the surest basis of public happiness.”¹³⁰ Moreover, “In one in which the measures of government receive their impression so immediately from the sense of the community as in ours, it [knowledge] is proportionally essential.”¹³¹ Knowledge also “contributes” to the “security of a free constitution” by “convincing” those in government that “every valuable end in government is best answered by the enlightened confidence of the people,” by “teaching the people to know and to value their own rights,” thus protecting themselves against the “invasions of them,” and by allowing them “to distinguish between oppression and the

¹²⁸ Wesley, 5.

¹²⁹ In the preface to his book, Edgar Wesley mentions the question of the constitutionality of a national university as an issue “that once loomed large,” but “may now be regarded as settled” (v). Writing in the 1930s, Wesley cites as his reasoning that, “The many instances of federal support of education have clearly established the right of Congress to appropriate money for such a purpose” (v). He further states that an analysis on this question by Edmund J. James in 1899 and “other subsequent developments” allow for “the problem of constitutionality” not to be “treated” in his work (v). Still, while the claim can be made now that the constitutionality of such an institution is not in question, it was a factor in the early periods of this debate.

¹³⁰ George Washington, “First Annual Message,” January 8, 1790, *GW*, 469.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

necessary exercise of lawful authority.”¹³² Finally, it is knowledge that allows the people “to discriminate the spirit of liberty from that of licentiousness—cherishing the first, avoiding the last,” and to fuse “a speedy but temperate vigilance against encroachments, with an inviolable respect to the laws.”¹³³ Washington then concludes this discussion of the virtues of educating republican citizens by declaring that, “Whether this desirable object will be best promoted by affording aids to seminaries of learning already established; by the institution of a national university; or by any other expedients, will be well worthy of a place in the deliberations of Legislature.”¹³⁴ This last statement is reminiscent of Washington’s stand on the military academy, leaving the details up to those he felt more qualified. Yet, as his later addresses and correspondence reveal, he had clear intentions of what he believed to be the proper structure and purpose of a national university.

From Washington’s writings and addresses between 1795 and his death in 1799, a fairly detailed description of what he envisioned the national university becoming is constructible. In these writings, three central reasons for his desire to establish this national educational institution are evident. The first reason is to alleviate the predicament of educating America’s youth in Europe. The second involves an effort to assuage the problem of regional division and prejudice. The third, and most broad in its implications, is to provide an extensive liberal education in the arts, sciences, literature, and government and politics. The remainder of Washington’s writings concerning the national university will be discussed in light of these three elements.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Washington's first reason for desiring the establishment of a national university centers on the harm he saw in educating the youth of a republic in countries that did not share the same mode of governance. In his letter to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, Washington, after recognizing that "A plan for the establishment of an University in the federal City, has frequently been the subject of conversation," asserts that, "It has always been a source of serious reflection and sincere regret with me, that the youth of the United States should be sent to foreign countries for the purpose of education."¹³⁵ While many of the youth do "escape the danger of contracting principles, unfriendly to republican government; yet we ought to deprecate the hazard attending ardent and susceptible minds, from being too strongly, and too early prepossessed in favor of other political systems, before they are capable of appreciating our own."¹³⁶ Less than two months later, in a letter to Thomas Jefferson discussing details pertaining to the establishment of a national university, Washington begins to summarize his reasons for pursuing this establishment by stating his desire to "supercede the necessity of sending youth of this country abroad, for the purpose of education (where too often principles and habits not friendly to republican government are imbibed, which are not easily discarded) by instituting one or our own, as will answer the end."¹³⁷ Lastly, in his Will, Washington begins the section regarding his endowment of his fifty shares in the Potowmack Company for the establishment of a national university, by declaring in familiar language that, "as it has always been a source of serious regret with me, to see the youth of these United States sent to foreign Countries for the purpose of Education,

¹³⁵ George Washington, "To the Commissioners of the District of Columbia," January 28, 1795, *GW*, 605.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ George Washington, "To Thomas Jefferson," March 15, 1795, *GW*, 608-9.

often before their minds were formed, or they had imbibed any adequate ideas of the happiness of their own.”¹³⁸ Thus, these youth were given to the circumstance of “contracting too frequently, not only habits of dissipation and extravagance, but principles unfriendly to Republican Governmt. and to the true and genuine liberties of mankind; which thereafter, are rarely overcome.”¹³⁹ Inherent in these sentiments regarding the education of America’s youth, is Washington’s belief that there is something unique in being raised under a republican regime, and thereby in preparation to be a citizen of such a government. In the broad context, his concern is again for the prosperity and strengthening of the still juvenile Union. Education of republican citizens is just as important as education of military officers, if not more; for as was already discussed, the army of a republic should always be citizens first, and soldiers second. These larger concerns, which Washington carried for his nation, will continue to surface throughout his additional rationale for a national university.

The second reason Washington voiced in support of the establishment of a national university concerns the problem of regional prejudice and divide so prevalent in the young nation. Washington claims in his letter to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, in January of 1795, that a “consideration of great magnitude” for him in this discussion of the rationale for a national university is its utility in “assembling the youth from the different parts of this rising republic, contributing from their intercourse, and the interchange of information, to the removal of prejudices which might perhaps, sometimes

¹³⁸ George Washington, “Last Will and Testament,” July 9, 1799, *GW*, 670. The details of Washington’s shares in the Potowmack Company are discussed in footnote number 223, page 58, in the following section.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

arise, from local circumstances.”¹⁴⁰ Likewise, in his letter to Jefferson regarding the national university, Washington includes in his summary of the purpose he sees for this institution, that “by associating them in the same seminary, will contribute to wear off those prejudices, and unreasonable jealousies, which prevent or weaken friendships and, impair the harmony of the Union.”¹⁴¹ This concern for the “harmony of the Union” is a recurring theme in Washington’s works, as part of his larger concern for the prosperity and continuance of the Union. Moreover, in a letter to Alexander Hamilton on September 1, 1796, Washington mentions his intentions for the national university as an institution “where the Youth from *all parts* of the United states might receive” an extensive education.¹⁴² In his opinion, one of the most important outcomes of this university is that “the Juvenal period of life, when friendships are formed, and habits established that will stick by one; the youth, or young men from different parts of the United States would be assembled together.”¹⁴³ Thus, these youth “would by degrees discover that there was not that cause for those jealousies and prejudices which one part of the Union had imbibed against another part: of course, sentiments of more liberality in the general policy of the Country would result from it.”¹⁴⁴ In this way, a national university serves to turn the eyes of the citizens from their individual and state interests, to the greater good of the whole Union. Washington argues that the utility of this principle is proved by the Revolution, in that, “A century in the ordinary intercourse,

¹⁴⁰ George Washington, “To the Commissioners of the District of Columbia,” January 28, 1795, *GW*, 606.

¹⁴¹ George Washington, “To Thomas Jefferson,” March 15, 1795, *GW*, 609.

¹⁴² George Washington, “To Alexander Hamilton,” September 1, 1796, *GW*, 649.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

would not have accomplished what the Seven years association in Arms did.”¹⁴⁵ At the same time, Washington cautions that, “prejudices are beginning to revive again, and never will be eradicated so effectually by any other means as the intimate intercourse of characters early in life, who, in all probability, will be at the head of the councils of this country in a more advanced stage of it.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, from this statement, Washington clearly saw a national university as training the future leaders of the Union—leaders who saw the good of the nation ahead of regional and state “prejudices” in which they were possibly raised.

In his two latter pieces concerning the national university, Washington echoes the same sentiments as these earlier letters. In his “Eighth Annual Message,” in December of 1796, he lists as among the “motives” for such an institution, “the assimilation of the principles, opinions, and manners, of our countrymen, by the common education of a portion of our youth from every quarter.”¹⁴⁷ He adds that, “The more homogeneous our citizens can be made in these particulars, the greater will be our prospect of permanent union.”¹⁴⁸ Here again is Washington’s concern for the prosperity and strengthening of the Union. In his Will, many of the arguments used in the letter to Hamilton resurface again as well. To alleviate the aforementioned problem of educating America’s youth in Europe, he writes that it been his “ardent wish to see a plan devised on a liberal scale which would have a tendency to sprd. systematic ideas through all parts of this rising Empire, thereby to do away local attachments and State prejudices, as far as the nature of

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 649-50.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 650.

¹⁴⁷ George Washington, “Eighth Annual Message,” December 7, 1796, *GW*, 509.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

things would, or indeed ought to admit, from our National Councils.”¹⁴⁹ Washington sees no other “plan likely to effect the measure than the establishment of a university in the central part of the United States, to which the youth of fortune and talents from all parts” can be sent for their education.¹⁵⁰ As mentioned earlier, by bringing them together in this university in their “Juvenile years,” they will be able to shed any regional “prejudices and habitual jealousies . . . which, when carried to excess, are never failing sources of disquietude to the Public mind, and pregnant of mischievous consequences to this Country.”¹⁵¹ Not only did Washington clearly see excessive regional attachments as divisive and contrary to the health of the Union, but also that one of the primary means in a republic to remedy this situation is the education of its citizens. A national university that educates promising youth from all over the nation therefore contributes to the health, longevity, and prosperity of the Union all the more.

One additional aspect of Washington’s sentiments concerning a national university that should not be overlooked in this context is his insistence on the central location of this institution. To be sure, a key element of his plan to assuage regional divide and provide a common experience for American youths of all regions was to establish the university in the new capital in the District of Columbia. Of course, this is clearly ascertained from Washington’s letter to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, where he declares that, “The federal City, from its centrality, and the advantages which, in other respects it must have over any other place in the U: States,

¹⁴⁹ George Washington, “Last Will and Testament,” July 9, 1799, *GW*, 670.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

ought to be preferred, as a proper site for such a University.”¹⁵² True, in this letter he speaks of D.C. only as a “proper site,” but he later writes to Thomas Jefferson that, “I had but little hesitation in giving the federal dist. a preference of all other places for this Institution.”¹⁵³ Washington then gives six reasons why he favors a national university in D.C., among them its stature as the location of the government of the Union, “its centrality,” and its proximity to Virginia.¹⁵⁴ In this same letter, Washington also refers to a letter he was composing “to the Executive of Virginia on this subject.”¹⁵⁵ In that letter, dated March 16, 1795, Washington uses similar language to that already discussed for a university to prevent foreign education and regional divide, and then proclaims that, “It has been represented, that an University, . . . is contemplated to be built in the federal city.”¹⁵⁶ He adds that, “This position is so eligible from its centrality—so convenient to Virginia, by whose legislature the shares were granted, and in which part the federal district stands—and combines so many other conveniences, that I have determined to vest the Potomack shares in that University.”¹⁵⁷ Later that year, the Governor presented Washington’s letter to the Virginia House of Delegates, which then passed resolutions including the statement “that the plan contemplated for erecting an University at the Federal City where the youth of the several states may be assembled, and their course of

¹⁵² George Washington, “To the Commissioners of the District of Columbia,” January 28, 1795, *GW*, 606.

¹⁵³ George Washington, “To Thomas Jefferson,” March 15, 1795, *GW*, 607.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 607. The close placement of the District to Virginia seems to be important in one sense, because the shares of stock he planned to endow the university with were given from the Virginia legislature, which he speaks of in this same letter to Jefferson. The other two reasons for having the institution in D.C. stem from the educational benefits of observing the national government in the city, a factor that will be noted shortly in conjunction with Washington’s proposed curriculum.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 608.

¹⁵⁶ George Washington, Letter to Governor Robert Brooke of Virginia, March 16, 1795, from the George Washington Papers, Library of Congress, quoted in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett, vol. XX (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 312.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 312-3. As mentioned earlier, the fate of these shares, which Washington endowed in his Will, is discussed in the following section.

education finished, deserves the countenance and support of each state.”¹⁵⁸ Indeed, placing the national university in the District of Columbia was a key element of Washington’s plan for a unifying institution because of the city’s central location and its stature as the seat of the national government. This was surely not an easily accepted proposal for each state or legislator though, as even the decision to relocate the capital in the District was part of a larger agreement between Jefferson and Hamilton for Jefferson’s approval of Hamilton’s policy for the “national government” to assume “the states’ debts.”¹⁵⁹ Still, in Washington’s eyes, locating this university in the District of Columbia was a crucial part of truly making it a *national* institution. With the first two reasons for Washington’s advocacy of this university discussed, as well as its location, the only question remaining is what should be included in such a national education?

In his addresses and writings concerning his national university concept, Washington does not shy away from enumerating the type of education he sees fit to take place in such an institution. His sentiments on this topic form the third reason for his proposals of the national university, centered on the notion that a broad liberal education makes good citizens and thereby contributes to the health and prosperity of the Union. Similar to his comments on the importance of imparting knowledge to the citizens of a republic, he writes in a letter to Alexander Hamilton in 1796 that, “I mean Education *generally* as one of the surest means of enlightening and givg. just ways of thinking to

¹⁵⁸ Virginia House of Delegates Resolution for December 1, 1795, from the *Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia* (Richmond, 1795), 63-4, quoted in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett, vol. XX (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 313.

¹⁵⁹ Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-1993*, 2^d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1994), 81.

our Citizens, but particularly the establishment of a university.”¹⁶⁰ In his “Eighth Annual Message” he alludes to the type of education profitable to the citizens of a republic by claiming that surely Congress realizes “how much a flourishing state of the arts and sciences contributes to national prosperity and reputation.”¹⁶¹ Fortunately, Washington did not leave his contemporaries in the dark concerning what his conception of a national university should teach, and enumerated two tracts of learning that should take place at this institution.

The first major part of Washington’s proposed curriculum for the national university is, in its essence, a broad liberal education. In his letter to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, Washington declares his desire that “a plan be adopted by which the arts, Sciences and Belles lettres, could be taught in their *fullest* extent; thereby embracing *all* the advantages of European tuition with the means of acquiring the liberal knowledge which is necessary to qualify our citizens for the exigencies of public, as well as private life.”¹⁶² Likewise, in his 1796 letter to Alexander Hamilton, Washington describes the national university as a place where the youth from all over America “might receive polish of Erudition in the Arts, Sciences, and Belle Letters.”¹⁶³ In his “Last Will and Testament,” the language is much the same, as he proposes a university where American youth “might be sent for the completion of their Education in all branches of

¹⁶⁰ George Washington, “To Alexander Hamilton,” September 1, 1796, *GW*, 649.

¹⁶¹ George Washington, “Eighth Annual Message,” December 7, 1796, *GW*, 509.

¹⁶² George Washington, “To the Commissioners of the District of Columbia,” January 28, 1795, *GW*, 605-6. See footnote number 56, page 18, for definitions of “Belles Lettres.” While Washington was obviously familiar with this French term, Daniel J. Boorstin states in his Introduction to *A Sacred Union of Citizens* that Washington “did not read Latin, and was embarrassed by his lack of knowledge of French, which once discouraged him from accepting an invitation to France” (xi).

¹⁶³ George Washington, “To Alexander Hamilton,” September 1, 1796, *GW*, 649.

polite literature; in arts and Sciences.”¹⁶⁴ While the sciences are emphasized, much like the technical aspects of the military education of artillerists and engineers, the liberal aspects of the arts and literature bear equal footing. However, the key point that must not be overlooked is that, according to Washington, both the sciences and arts are necessary for the education of republican citizens.

The second key aspect of Washington’s national university curriculum is more practical in nature, but just as necessary, if not more so, for citizens of a republic, as it involves the education of government and politics. In his March 15, 1795 letter to Thomas Jefferson, Washington lists, as one of his motives mentioned earlier for favoring the District of Columbia for the location of the national university, the city’s soon to be role as “the permanent Seat of government of this Union, and where the laws and policy of it must be better understood than in any local part thereof.”¹⁶⁵ As additional reasoning, he claims that, “as this Seminary is contemplated for the completion of education, and study of the sciences (not for boys in their rudiments) it will afford the Students an opportunity of attending the debates in Congress, and thereby becoming more liberally, and better acquainted with the principles of law, and government.”¹⁶⁶ Washington goes into more detail concerning the practical aspects of this additional education while writing to Hamilton, by asserting that those students “disposed to run a political course, might not only be instructed in the theory and principles, but (this Seminary being at the Seat of the General Government) where the Legislature wd. be in Session half the year, and the Interests and politics of the Nation of course would be discussed, they would lay

¹⁶⁴ George Washington, “Last Will and Testament,” July 9, 1799, *GW*, 670.

¹⁶⁵ George Washington, “To Thomas Jefferson,” March 15, 1795, *GW*, 607.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

the surest foundation for the practical part also.”¹⁶⁷ In his Will, Washington simply mentions this factor as “acquiring knowledge in the principles of Politics and good Government.”¹⁶⁸ Yet, it is in his “Eighth Annual Message” that Washington gives his most emphatic endorsement for this element of practical education in the national university when he proclaims, “a primary object of such a national institution should be, the education of our youth in the science of *government*.”¹⁶⁹ He adds that, “In a republic, what species of knowledge can be equally important? and what duty more pressing on its legislature, than to patronize a plan for communicating it to those who are to be the future guardians of the liberties of the country?”¹⁷⁰ Washington understood that in republican government, it is ultimately the citizens who are the “guardians” of their liberties. Therefore, they should not only be schooled in an extensive liberal education, but must also be familiar with the nature of republican government. This is the education he sought to implant in a national university, in addition to alleviating regional division and the dangers of schooling abroad. Once again, it is a concern for the strengthening and continuance of the Union that leads Washington to propose such an institution to train citizens.

There is perhaps no better document that ties together Washington’s overarching concerns, which lead him to propose a national university, than the sentiments expressed in his Farewell Address. Foremost in these concerns is his emphasis on the Union, as evident in his statement that the citizens of America must “properly estimate the immense

¹⁶⁷ George Washington, “To Alexander Hamilton,” September 1, 1796, *GW*, 649.

¹⁶⁸ George Washington, “Last Will and Testament,” July 9, 1799, *GW*, 670.

¹⁶⁹ George Washington, “Eighth Annual Message,” December 7, 1796, *GW*, 509.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 509-10.

value of your national Union to your collective and individual happiness.”¹⁷¹ Therefore, citizens should watch “for its [the Union’s] preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can in any event be abandoned, and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our Country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together various parts.”¹⁷² Washington further warns against the practice of “characterizing parties by *Geographical* discrimination: *Northern* and *Southern*; *Atlantic* and *Western*; whence designing men may endeavour to excite a belief that there is a real difference of local interest and views.”¹⁷³ Likewise, Matthew Spalding and Patrick Garrity point out that Washington’s overall “advice” in this final address “was to maintain the Union, the Constitution, and the habits of good citizenship, and to observe good faith and justice towards all nations.”¹⁷⁴ These themes of the centrality of the Union and the responsibilities of citizens earlier in the Address lay the foundation for Washington’s later general comments regarding education. Simply put, “Washington’s vision of Constitutional Union culminates in the promotion of educational institutions.”¹⁷⁵

The sentiments expressed in the Farewell Address concerning education, though, are not what Washington had originally envisioned for his parting words to the American citizenry. In his September 1, 1796 letter to Alexander Hamilton concerning the drafting of the address, he asks Hamilton to “introduce a Section in the Address expressive of

¹⁷¹ George Washington, “Farewell Address,” Sept 19, 1796, *GW*, 515.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 517.

¹⁷⁴ Spalding and Garrity, *A Sacred Union of Citizens*, 62.

¹⁷⁵ Virginia L. Arbery, “Washington’s Farewell Address and the Form of the American Regime,” *Patriot Sage*, 208.

these sentiments [for a national university] . . . after the one [section] which relates to our religious obligations, or in a preceeding part, as one of the recommendatory measures to counteract the evils arising from Geographical discriminations.”¹⁷⁶ Three days later, however, Hamilton replied to Washington’s request by suggesting that, “The idea of the university is one of those which I think will be most properly reserved for your speech at the opening of the session. A general suggestion respecting education will very fitly come into the address.”¹⁷⁷ The next day, Hamilton expanded on his comments, stating that Washington’s advocacy of a national university and military academy, among other things, would better wait until the Congressional address.¹⁷⁸ Hamilton’s reasoning for his opinion was that, “There will several things come there much better than in a general address to The People which likewise would swell the address too much.”¹⁷⁹ Apparently Hamilton felt that such specific proposals, such as a national university or military

¹⁷⁶ George Washington, “To Alexander Hamilton,” September 1, 1796, *GW*, 650. The mention of Washington’s letter to Hamilton concerning the drafting of the Farewell Address raises the issue of who actually authored this document? In *A Sacred Union of Citizens*, Matthew Spalding and Patrick Garrity hold to a view of “Washington’s intellectual paternity of the Farewell Address” (50). Indeed, both Hamilton and Madison played a part in drafting various sections of the address, with Madison’s section coming four years earlier (49; see also footnote number 180). Spalding and Garrity note that Washington included Madison’s draft in his correspondence with Hamilton, and “wanted it to remain,” not only for “content” reasons, but also for “reasons of politics” (49). “Washington surely hoped that allowing both Madison and Hamilton a part in his valedictory would affirm his belief that partisan differences could be overcome by recourse to common principles. As both Madison and Jefferson would recognize Madison’s contribution, party tensions might be reduced” (49). Spalding and Garrity also mention that “Washington’s reuniting of Madison and Hamilton would serve to recreate the common purpose and success of Publius” (50). Either way, the Farewell Address comes across as another example of the magnitude of the regime struggle occurring between the Federalists and Republicans during the 1790s.

¹⁷⁷ Alexander Hamilton, “To George Washington,” September 4, 1796, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett, vol. XX (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 316. The other speech Hamilton refers to is Washington’s “Eighth Annual Message,” where Washington specifically mentioned the national university.

¹⁷⁸ Alexander Hamilton, “To George Washington,” September 5, 1796, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. XX, 317.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 317-8.

academy, would be out of place in this sweeping “valedictory address.”¹⁸⁰ Regardless, Hamilton added that his health had prevented him from writing this section of the address, which led to Washington’s penning of the paragraph on education.¹⁸¹

Washington’s paragraph on education in the Address is noted as being “one of the most succinct in the document,” and he inserted it in a location very close to his initial suggestion to Hamilton for a national university section.¹⁸² Indeed, after speaking of the need for “virtue and morality” as a “necessary spring of popular government,” Washington recommends to “Promote then as an object of primary importance, Institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened.”¹⁸³ This statement echoes Washington’s views concerning the importance of educating citizens in his “First Annual Message.” For as discussed earlier, in republican government, it is the citizens themselves that are fundamentally responsible for maintaining their liberties and the health of the Union. Likewise, Matthew Spalding comments on this passage by stating that, “By ‘enlightened’ Washington means not only the basic parameters of liberal education but also knowledge of the rights of man and the obligations of citizenship.”¹⁸⁴ These general observations on Washington’s view of education fit with Spalding and Garrity’s assertion that while “his view of education was

¹⁸⁰ Spalding and Garrity, in *A Sacred Union of Citizens*, point out that Washington first used the term “valedictory address” in a letter to James Madison on May 20, 1792, as he was contemplating leaving office after his first term (46). Madison did write a draft for such an address, which Washington saved when he remained in office, thus allowing for Madison’s draft, “in amended form,” to “make up the first parts of the 1796 address” (47).

¹⁸¹ Spalding and Garrity, *A Sacred Union of Citizens*, 53.

¹⁸² Ibid.; George Washington, “To Alexander Hamilton,” *GW*, 650.

¹⁸³ George Washington, “Farewell Address,” *GW*, 522.

¹⁸⁴ Matthew Spalding, “Making Citizens: George Washington and the American Character,” *Patriot Sage*, 233.

primarily practical," it was, "In the end, . . . foremost that of a solid and ethical general education."¹⁸⁵ Much the same, "Washington believed that formal schooling was especially important and supported numerous institutions of learning."¹⁸⁶ As Spalding and Garrity point out, "Washington's most important contribution in this area [of education] was an attempt to create a national university."¹⁸⁷

Even though the national university is never mentioned in the Farewell Address, the principles embodied in the document not only fit with Washington's previous thought concerning the role and purpose of this national institution of higher learning, but also with his notions of the importance of education generally, as evidenced above. Additionally, the grand sentiments of the preservation of the Union and the education of its citizens not only apply to Washington's conception of the national university, but also to that of the military academy. Evident in these judgments is the concern for an energetic "Government for the whole" that is "indispensable" to the "efficacy and permanency of Your Union."¹⁸⁸ While Washington saw the education of citizens provided by a national university as a critical element to the preservation of the Union, he also saw a strong and well-organized military establishment, including a military academy, as contributing to the same end.

¹⁸⁵ Spalding and Garrity, *A Sacred Union of Citizens*, 81.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. Spalding and Garrity go on to discuss Washington's endowment of various "charity schools for the education and support of poor and indigent children, in particular those who were the children of fallen soldiers" (81). Washington endowed some of his bank shares in his Will for a school "for the purpose of Educating such Orphan children of such other poor and indigent persons as are unable to accomplish it with their own means" ("Last Will and Testament," *GW*, 668-9). In his Will, he also endowed his stock shares in the James River Company, given to him by the Virginia Legislature, "to the establishment of a seminary in Virginia," which would later become Washington and Lee University (Wesley, 7).

¹⁸⁷ Spalding and Garrity, *A Sacred Union of Citizens*, 81.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 518.

Indeed, Washington's national university has its roots, like so many of his other policies and actions, in his concern for the preservation of the Union. He envisioned the said institution doing this by providing the proper republican education, that of a liberal education offering instruction in the operation and the citizen's role in government, to youth from every corner of America. Youth so educated, in a broad curriculum including the classics and the sciences, would then spread their knowledge to all the parts of the nation from whence they came, much like those officers educated in a military academy would pass on their training to the militiamen of the nation. At the same time, Washington's writings also hint that the national university would likely be training the future leaders of the republic. Regardless of the nuances of his conception though, Washington designed an extensive national university to first and foremost prepare and educate citizens for their role in the new republic—a government and nation whose future largely rests in their hands.

Explanations for the Initial Failure of Washington's Proposals

One of the first questions that naturally arises during a discussion of Washington's proposals for these two, essential in his eyes, institutions of national education, is why did they not succeed, especially given Washington's stature in the infant republic? As Forest McDonald proclaims, "he was respected, admired, even revered by his countrymen, and he was the most trusted man of the age. What is more, and different, he was the most trustworthy man."¹⁸⁹ With such trust and admiration, why were Washington's proposals not fulfilled, even in some partial way, during his public service? The answer lies in part with the very nature of the government that Washington

¹⁸⁹ Forest McDonald, "Today's Indispensable Man," *Patriot Sage*, 24.

helped found. For in the extended republic of the United States, “the multiplicity of interests” makes it much more difficult for such proposals to be passed, no matter who their proponent.¹⁹⁰ Additionally, these various interests were an outgrowth of the growing partisan discord during the 1790s, which battled over the course the new American regime would take under the Constitution. Conflict between the Federalists and Republicans over the extent of national authority, chief among other issues, directly affected Washington’s proposals for a military academy and a national university. Nevertheless, before discussing the multiple interests and partisan struggles that did indeed mark the failure of Washington’s proposals, it is important to note what progress was made towards these ends during Washington’s public life.

Since Washington was a key actor in calls for a military academy tracing back to the beginning of the Revolution, it is important to at least mention the major initiatives that constituted the beginning of officer education up to the start of his administration. Whereas it is not necessary to go into detail, these programs laid the ground work for the continual evolution of the officer educational system up to Washington’s Presidency, and later, the founding of West Point in 1802. The most significant of these initiatives during the Revolution, the Corps of Invalids, was established in 1777 “to care for and, if possible, to employ disabled veterans, had the additional task of functioning as ‘a school for propagating military knowledge and discipline.’”¹⁹¹ This plan, which was mainly the product of John Adams’s maneuvering in Congress, resulted in the Corps guarding “supplies in Philadelphia and Boston until ordered to West Point in 1781 to assist artillery

¹⁹⁰ James Madison, “Federalist 51,” *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: Mentor, 1961), 324.

¹⁹¹ Pappas, 6.

units garrisoning the fortifications,” but “There is no indication that it ever met its schooling requirement.”¹⁹² Yet, Holden, citing an “elaborate map of West Point” made in 1780 showing a library, school building, and laboratory, declares that the Corps of Invalids and instruction there “constituted the Military Academy at the Army.”¹⁹³ The question is still posed however, “How much did the term imply?”¹⁹⁴ Besides this alleged primitive academy instruction at West Point, there was also, as mentioned earlier, Knox’s “academy” at Pluckemin, N.J., which he established while wintered with the artillery.¹⁹⁵ In addition, in 1783 Congress issued a report recommending an expanding of the “Corps of Engineers” to include several other regiments of infantry (together with one of dragoons) and artillery, which would contain a professor of mathematics, chemistry, natural philosophy, “civil architecture, etc.”¹⁹⁶ Once again, plans for a “military academy like that of Woolwich” were “again put aside in favor of a regimental school of application.”¹⁹⁷ Washington advocated the former, but would have to wait until his presidency to get another chance to seriously pursue such an institution.¹⁹⁸

During Washington’s terms in office, two initiatives passed Congress that paved the way for the West Point’s eventual founding under Jefferson. An Act of Congress on May 7, 1794 “created the rank of cadet.”¹⁹⁹ This was followed closely on May 9, 1794, by Congress’ passing of “An Act providing for raising and organizing a Corps of Artillerists and Engineers,” which was to consist of “four companies” that each included

¹⁹² *CUSMA*, 203; Pappas, 6.

¹⁹³ *CUSMA*, 204.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *CUSMA*, 203-4.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 208-9.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁹⁹ Sidney Forman, *West Point: A History of the United States Military Academy*, Special Edition for the U.S. Military Academy Sesquicentennial, 1952 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 14.

“two cadets.”²⁰⁰ Additionally, the act gave provision for the “Secretary of War to provide, at the public expense, under such regulations as shall be directed by the President of the United States, the necessary books, instruments and apparatus, for the use and benefit of the said corps.”²⁰¹ Ambrose points out that at this time in America, “cadets were junior officers assigned to the Corps at West Point. They had the right to command, to sit as members of court-martial boards, and to employ servants. They were supposed to attend classes taught by older officers and learn their art . . . but the cadets found themselves spending more of their time doing irksome tasks senior officers wished to avoid, such as drill, paperwork, and policing the grounds.”²⁰² These acts led to Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Rochefontaine’s assumption of command at West Point in February 1796, “with orders from the War Department to initiate a course of instruction.”²⁰³ After posting a notice that classes were to begin on March 29, “The officers, incensed at the insult to their position contained in the concept that they had anything to learn about their profession, promptly burned down the ‘Old Provost,’ the building that housed the instruction room.”²⁰⁴ As a result, “No classes were held.”²⁰⁵ Although the Corps of Artillerists and Engineers stationed at West Point did not fulfill the notions of Washington and other proponents for a military academy during his presidency, these two acts and the resulting corps ultimately provided the foundation for officer education developments during Adam’s administration, and finally Jefferson’s.

²⁰⁰ *Laws of Congress Relative to West Point and the United States Military Academy From 1786 to 1877*, comp. Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Robert H. Hall (USMA Press), 2, from the Archives Division of the United States Military Academy Library, West Point, New York.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² Ambrose, 11.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 12. Additionally, Holden points out in the *Centennial* history that “Three battalions of the Corps of Artillerists and Engineers were assembled at West Point in 1795” (212).

²⁰⁴ Ambrose, 12.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Taking into account these initial steps in the evolution of the officer education to which Washington contributed, Edward Holden, writing in West Point's *Centennial* history, presents a narrative that is focused chiefly on Washington instead of Jefferson, unlike many of the other prominent accounts of West Point's establishment. After citing Washington's letter to Alexander Hamilton in December of 1799, regarding his desire not to comment on the specifics of Hamilton's plan for a military academy system, Holden states that:

Washington "ever" considered the establishment of a military academy as of "primary importance." In writing these words his mind must have reviewed the whole history of his endeavors to establish a system of military education; the early proposals of members of his military family; the formation of the Military Academy at the Army; the assembly, by his order, of the Corps of Invalids at West Point in 1780-81, with its little engineer school on the plain; the "experiments" in gunnery during the war; the organization of the sappers; the Army's need of trained engineers; his own projects of 1783 to include a military school as part of the peace establishment. Noting how all these had so far failed to fulfill the prime necessity, he would recall his frequent recommendations to the Legislature; the creation of Cadets of the Service in 1794; the provision for teachers, instruments, and apparatus; the selection of accomplished officers to conduct the school at West Point, and their beginning of systematic military education. For nearly a quarter of a century he had striven to establish a military academy for the nation. Now that the project was near accomplishment, he once more expressed to the Legislature his convictions and hopes, and in this final letter claimed his part.²⁰⁶

For these reasons, Holden declares Washington the "founder" of West Point.²⁰⁷ It is Washington, he proclaims, that "had ever advocated the establishment of two national institutions of learning—a military academy and a national university."²⁰⁸ Thus, "On the establishment of either it could claim him as its father and founder."²⁰⁹ While Washington's commitment to both proposals for national higher education is

²⁰⁶ *CUSMA*, 216.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 216, 222.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

unquestioned, Holden is somewhat overzealous in equating West Points founding centrally with Washington. For as it will be argued later, the West Point created in 1802 was much more aligned with Jefferson's notion of military education, national service, and the national university, than Washington's sentiments on these subjects.

Despite such praise, and the gradual developments in officer education that took place under Washington, the question still remains of why he was not successful in founding an extensive military academy, given his stature and the number of influential figures that shared his view? The answer lies not only in the circumstances of the day, but even more importantly in the institutions of our republican government—namely Congress, and therefore, the states. In regards to Washington's calls for a military academy in his 1783 "Sentiments on a Peace Establishment," Pappas proclaims that, "Congress was struggling with far more serious and timely problems involving the discharge of the Continental Army and ignored Washington's recommendations."²¹⁰ During the war, it must be noted that the need for artillerists and engineers, a primary motive for the calls for an academy, were put aside once foreign officers joined the American cause. Since these officers "filled this requirement of Washington's army," Congress had little motive to establish an extensive academy.²¹¹ At the conclusion of the war, Congress rejected a report submitted by Hamilton recommending the size and structure of the post-war military establishment that combined Washington and Steuben's proposals.²¹² "Congress decided that the states would provide whatever forces were

²¹⁰ Pappas, 7.

²¹¹ Ibid., 6.

²¹² Ibid., 8.

required.”²¹³ Ambrose concurs with this interpretation, stating that, “As soon as the war ended, Congress indicated its feelings by declaring that ‘standing armies in time of peace are inconsistent with the principles of republican government, dangerous to the liberties of a free people, and generally converted into destructive engines for establishing despotism’ and immediately reduced the army.”²¹⁴ Thus, Washington and his counterparts not only had to overcome the entrenched fear of standing armies, but also the struggles of the now free and independent states to mold themselves into a nation. Unfortunately for Washington, these obstacles would remain even when he assumed the Presidency.

By the time Washington took the Oath of Office, the circumstances of the day had turned the popular sentiment, and even that of Congress, somewhat to his favor regarding provisions for a military establishment and officer education. As Forman observes, “the cumulative effect of domestic unrest under the Articles of the Confederation, Shay’s rebellion, frontier wars, boundary disputes and the imminent danger of involvement in the complexities arising from the French Revolution of 1789 all moved public opinion in favor of a more energetic national government and a better-trained armed force.”²¹⁵ While Forman is correct in stating that the complications under the Articles of the Confederation helped strengthen the calls for an energetic national government, long advocated by Washington, to say that public and especially Congressional sentiment was completely in favor of national defense proposals is a stretch. Even the Constitution itself “divided military power between the federal government and the states, giving

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ambrose, 9-10.

²¹⁵ Forman, 14.

paramount power to the former while guarding against excessive centralized authority by sharing national power between Congress and the President.”²¹⁶ “The Constitution institutionalized the dual-army tradition,” especially with the passage of the Second Amendment during the first Congress.²¹⁷ Washington did have the opportunity to establish a regular force, but “In regard to the militia, Congress foiled nationalist aspirations.”²¹⁸ Congress accomplished this by first delaying action on the previously mentioned Washington and Knox plan for military establishment until 1792, and then passing the “Calling Forth Act and the Uniform Militia Act” which limited the “vitality” of a national military establishment in many substantive ways.²¹⁹ Even the formulation of such acts to strengthen the military establishment occurred only after the reality of the need for a capable military was dramatically realized by events such as the disastrous St. Clair incident.²²⁰ In addition to Congressional constraints, even the training that was approved in the Corps of Artillerists and Engineers was neglected, “At least in part . . . from the feeling, inherited from Europe and still present in the American army, that honor, courage, and loyalty were the important elements in a soldier’s character, while

²¹⁶ Millet and Maslowski, 88.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 89.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 89-90. The Calling Forth Act “hedged the President’s authority to summon the militia to execute the laws or suppress insurrections,” even though it gave the President freedom “to call forth the militia” in case of “foreign invasion” (89). This is consistent with anti-nationalist concerns over the use of a regular army on the citizens for the republic, while at the same time realizing that a regular force was necessary in times of war. Theodore Crackel has an extensive discussion of such sentiments, as seen in Republican thought, in his work, *Mr. Jefferson’s Army*. The Uniform Militia Act, while “requiring the enrollment of all able-bodied white men between eighteen and forty-five,” harmed nationalist proposals by its failure to “provide for a select corps in each state or for federal control over officership and training,” among others factors (Millet and Maslowski, 90). “What little vitality the militia retained reposed in volunteer units forming a de facto elite corps; this was far from what Washington visualized because the units were neither standardized nor nationalized” (90).

²²⁰ Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment, 1783-1802* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 123-4. Kohn gives a complete narrative of the details and implications of this massive defeat at the hands of the Indians in Ohio in November of 1791 (108-127).

knowledge was at best secondary.”²²¹ Clearly, the anti-nationalist views of the Anti-Federalists, and later Republicans, were not powerless despite the governing majority of the nationalist oriented Federalists.

It is true that Washington never did formally propose a detailed plan for the foundation of an extensive military academy. His writings not only show the lack of specifics he enumerated in regards to academy education, but also his sentiment that Congress and those more qualified than he in these matters should ultimately design such an institution. What would have happened if he had submitted an elaborate plan will never be known. Yet, it is clear that the combination of foreign officers filling-in for the lack of well-trained American officers, and the presence of an uncooperative Congress, resulting from a still active state-sovereignty sentiment, presented a formidable, and indeed impenetrable obstruction in Washington’s quest for a national military academy. Not surprisingly, the barrier for his national university concept shared much the same origin and fate.

There is much less to tell in regards to any success Washington had with the national university concept than with a national military academy. Indeed, as Holden pointed out in the preceding section from the *Centennial*, and as was shown in the addresses and letters in the previous section, Washington was ever advocating such an institution. Even so, his consistent proposals were to little avail. The central action that did take place during Washington’s Presidency pertaining to a national university was a result of his personal advocacy and pursuit of the concept, and not a broader aim for the administration. Just five days after Washington presented his “Eighth Annual Message”

²²¹ Ambrose, 11-2.

to Congress on December 7, 1796, "James Madison presented a memorial from the Commissioners of the Federal City, stating the many advantages that would result from the building of a National University at the said city . . . They pray that Congress would take such measures as that they may be able to receive any donations which may be made to the institution."²²² It was actually Washington's decision to grant his 50 shares of stock in the Potowmack Company, "presented to Washington by the Commonwealth of Virginia by acts of 1784 and 1785," to the "Commissioners for the establishment of an institution of learning in the new city" that led them to put forth this proposal to Congress.²²³ It is from the debate in Congress over this memorial, and its relation with Washington's expressed sentiments for a national university in his recent message, that the arguments against such an institution, and indeed the reasons why it did not succeed, are evident.

The resolution offered to Congress by Representative Madison enumerated many of the same benefits of a national university as Washington advocated in his letters and addresses. The advantages listed for this institution include "The preservation of the morals and of the political principles of our youth; the savings of the expense of foreign education . . . the proportionate accession of wealth, the removal, or at least diminution,

²²² *Annals of Congress*, 4th Congress, 2^d Session (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1849), 1600.

²²³ Martin Paul Claussen, Jr., *The Fate of Washington's Bequest to a National University* (Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, 1968), 1, 7. Washington made the intention of his endowment known to the Commissioners of the District in the previously discussed letter, dated January 28, 1795 (Allen, 605-6). "The Potowmack Company had been organized in 1784 to open the navigation of the Potomac (as it later came to be spelled) River route to profitable trade with the West" (Claussen, 1). Claussen also mentions that the 50 shares of stock originally "had a total par value of \$22,222, an impressive sum at the time" (1). He adds that, "Washington anticipated generous dividends because of expected large toll returns. As it happened, the Potowmack Company was a financial failure, and it was absorbed by the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company in 1828. Only one small dividend was declared" (1). Claussen gives a detailed account of the trail of Washington's shares, formally endowed in his Will, until they were lost for good in a bank liquidation in 1839 (21).

of those local prejudices which at present exist in the several States, by the uniformity of education and the opportunity of a free interchange of sentiments and information among the youth from all the various parts of the Union.”²²⁴ Yet, several of the representatives disagreed with this list of proposed benefits. On December 22, 1796, Rep. Nicholas expressed a wide range of the sentiments against the proposal by arguing that the time had not “arrived” to establish such a university, and that “It would be inconvenient and inconsistent for people living at a considerable distance to send their children to this University . . . If it be a National University, it must be for the use of the nation.”²²⁵ In addition, he declared that Washington’s recommendation for the school “is no argument why we should precipitate the business: it is the last time he will have an opportunity to address this House, and it being an object he should like to see encouraged when it was practicable, he took that opportunity to express it.”²²⁶ Later in the debate, Rep. Nicholas also presented the view that, “Every district of country was competent to provide for the education of its own citizens, and he should not give his countenance to the national plan proposed because the expense would be enormous, and because he did not think it would be attended with any good effect, but with much evil.”²²⁷ Five days later, Rep. Brent asserted that if this resolution did consist of Congress establishing such a university, rather than simply allowing men to privately contribute to it, “He should object to it on Constitutional principles; because whatever had been the practice of that House, he was of opinion that imposing a revenue for such a purpose would be . . . arrogating a right

²²⁴ *American State Papers*, Class 10, Miscellaneous, 4th Congress, 2^d Session, no. 91, Congressional Information Service US Serial Set, ASP037, Microfiche, 153.

²²⁵ *Annals*, 4th Cong., 2^d Sess., 1697.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1700.

which they did not possess.”²²⁸ In reply to the attacks against a “national university,” Madison proclaimed during the first debate that the plan “calls it ‘An University in the District of Columbia;’ which he thought, was materially different.”²²⁹ While Madison’s remarks were true for the resolution at hand, in addition to the fact that it did not ask for Congress to approve or support the institution, “The 1796 debate” evidenced the fact “that Congressional opinion was overwhelmingly opposed to the idea of a national university.”²³⁰

Washington’s additional action of endowing the 50 shares in the Potowmack Company towards the national university in his Will were unsuccessful because of the same anti-nationalist sentiment evidenced in the previous debate. Moreover, it is clear from this discussion that the national university fell prey to many of the same sentiments that the military academy succumbed to during his service in public life. A majority in Congress saw both as too nationalist, perhaps too early, and even unnecessary. Ironically, Washington’s national university concept failed, in part, because of the very sentiments of regional divide and prejudice that his plan sought to assuage. However, at the root of this these conflicting interests and views of national authority and responsibility in relation to the state governments, lies the party conflict of the 1790s.

As stated at the beginning of this section, the failure of Washington’s proposed institutions during his public service can be seen in light of Federalist and Republican conflict. William Allen, in his essay, “George Washington and the Standing Oak,” declares that during the eight years of Washington’s presidency, “the Founding itself was

²²⁸ Ibid., 1710.

²²⁹ Ibid., 1702.

²³⁰ Claussen, 9.

consummated; yet during that same time, Americans witnessed the birth of what ultimately became the system of political parties.”²³¹ Additionally, “In the last six years of Washington’s administration, growing party discord was the most significant and most pressing political development.”²³² As for the origin of this partisan discord, Harry Jaffa proclaims that, “the Jeffersonian Republican party, was an outgrowth of democratic societies that had sprung up during Washington’s administration. There were partly stimulated by the French Revolution but in the main were the results of a conviction that Federalist policies would undo the work of the American Revolution and lead us back into the fold of Britain and of monarchy.”²³³ In addition to Washington’s “Neutrality Proclamation of 1793,” other events such as “the Whiskey Insurrection of 1794, the scourging of the Democratic Societies by Washington,” and “the heated debate over the Jay Treaty in 1795,” swiftly “polarized the leaders and their followers.”²³⁴ It is little surprise then, that in the midst of such heated conflict, Federalist notions concerning the military, such as, “the superiority of regulars over militia, that the central government in order to be supreme must possess the power of the sword, that in order to safeguard American security the government must rule and control in all matters of defense, and that the only sure way to protect the nation was to prepare for war in peacetime,” were attacked by Republicans.²³⁵ Hence, party discord can be seen as an additional, if not central, reason for the failure of the proposals for a national military academy, as well as a nationally organized militia system. Moreover, Washington’s conception of a national

²³¹ William B. Allen, “George Washington and the Standing Oak,” *Patriot Sage*, 103.

²³² *Ibid.*, 104.

²³³ Harry V. Jaffa, *Equality and Liberty: Theory and Practice in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 18.

²³⁴ Milkis and Nelson, 81-2; Hofstadter, 89.

²³⁵ Kohn, 283.

university, as “The capstone of all federalist ideas,” was misinterpreted by the Jeffersonians.²³⁶ According to Jaffa, they equated Washington’s rationale to unify the sentiments of American citizens with Madison’s “10th *Federalist*” example of how to create a faction-less citizenry “only by destroying liberty.”²³⁷ While it is unclear how influential or prevalent this interpretation was amongst the Republicans, especially since Madison and Jefferson favored a national university in some form, it is safe to say that the nationalist goals of Washington’s university were in many ways suspect to the majority of Republicans.²³⁸ Yet, despite the partisan struggles of Washington’s administrations, the American political soil still proved to be fertile for a military academy, partly due to a recasting of national university sentiment, albeit one much different than Washington’s dream.

Developments in Place of Washington’s Proposals

Even though Washington’s conception of an extensive military academy did not come to fruition during his public service, the steps taken in officer education while he was in office laid the foundation for West Point’s formal establishment in 1802. In fact, the Corps of Artillerists and Engineers was expanded by the addition of several regiments in April 1798 due to the “threat of war with France.”²³⁹ At this time, Congress also “provided fund for expanding coastal fortifications” and “building a navy.”²⁴⁰ Further Infantry and Light Dragoon regiments were added in July of that year, and “This force was increased again in 1799 by twenty-four regiments of infantry, another regiment of

²³⁶ Jaffa, 28.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Jaffa, 28. Jaffa goes on to say that Jefferson “abandoned it [the national university idea] in favor of a university for Virginia, and he and Madison came to believe that it would require a constitutional amendment for the federal government to have the power to establish it” (28-9).

²³⁹ Pappas, 14.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 11.

Artillerists and Engineers, and three mounted regiments.”²⁴¹ “This, however, was only a paper force that was never mustered because the threat of war never materialized.”²⁴² In the midst of this increase in the military establishment, the “Act to Augment the Army of the United States” of July 16, 1798, allowed President Adams “to appoint a number, not exceeding four, teachers of the arts and sciences necessary for the instruction of the artillerists and engineers.”²⁴³ These teachers were not only to train “Cadets,” but also “to instruct all the junior officers, and possibly the non-commissioned officers.”²⁴⁴ During this build-up, the number of cadets authorized in the military increased as well, as an act in March of 1799 “provided for 10 Cadets to each regiment of infantry and cavalry, and 32 Cadets to each regiment of artillery.”²⁴⁵ This threat of war not only provided for an increase in the general force, but also an excellent opportunity to once again recommend the establishment of an extensive military academy.

During this period of military build-up, “proposals and plans for a military academy were being sponsored by Henry Burbeck, a ranking artillery officer, Alexander Hamilton, and others.”²⁴⁶ Hence originated Hamilton’s plan to Secretary of War James McHenry, which he relayed to Washington in November of 1799, as was discussed in a previous section.²⁴⁷ Hamilton’s plan thus became the model for the report presented to Congress on January 13, 1800, recommending the establishment of a broad military

²⁴¹ Ibid., 14.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ “An Act to Augment the Army of the United States, and for Other Purposes,” July 16, 1798, *Laws of Congress Relative to West Point*, 3.

²⁴⁴ *CUSMA*, 210.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Forman, 15.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., and *CUSMA*, 215.

academy.²⁴⁸ The report states that “the dignity, the character to be supported, and the safety of the country, further require that it should have military institutions, should be capable of perpetuating the art of war, and of furnishing the means for forming a new and enlarged army, fit for service, in the shortest time possible, and at the least practicable expense to the State.”²⁴⁹ In addition, “This object [a military academy] has repeatedly engaged the favorable attention of the Legislature, and some laws towards its consummation have been passed.”²⁵⁰ “These, however, being yet inadequate to afford the requisite instruction to officers, and others, in ‘the principles of war, the exercises it requires, and the sciences upon which they are founded,’ the adoption of a more perfect plan is conceived to be indispensable for these purposes.”²⁵¹ The plan also mentions that a military academy “has also the high sanction of our late venerated President, whose talents and services were devoted, not to produce personal results, but to render a whole people great, flourishing, and happy.”²⁵² However, it would take a great deal more tangible political reasoning to pass this measure than a call to fulfill the late George Washington’s sentiments for such an institution.

Indeed, as historian Theodore Crackel emphatically states, “The Military Academy bill was attacked on its first reading, and again it languished.”²⁵³ Crackel cites the “upcoming transfer of the seat of government from Philadelphia to the new capital of

²⁴⁸ *American State Papers*, Class V, Military Affairs, vol. 1, no. 39 (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1832), 133. The plan put forth in this report mainly differs from Hamilton’s earlier plan by the fact that it consists of a four-school system, combining the Infantry and Cavalry schools, instead of the original five-school system.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 135.

²⁵³ Crackel, 55.

Washington” as disrupting affairs and the sponsorship of the bill.²⁵⁴ At the same time, “Republican attacks against the Federalist military establishment were gaining breadth and vigor, and the Adams faction was beginning to lend support to the opposition.”²⁵⁵ This split in the Federalist party between Adams, representing the moderates, and Hamilton, signifying the High Federalists, crystallized in February of 1799 with Adams’s decision to “reopen negotiations” with France.²⁵⁶ Richard Kohn argues that Adams’s decision “neatly fulfilled all” of his “personal and political goals: to avoid a brutally divisive war; to save American independence from a British alliance; to undermine the army and strike back at Hamilton, thereby preserving the President’s authority and personal dignity; and to disassociate himself from a program which might doom his chance for re-election.”²⁵⁷ It must be remembered though too, that Adams had not turned to an anti-military position, but that he and “Most Federalists could unite in favor of a small national military establishment for the West and for a program of preparedness at times when war threatened.”²⁵⁸ If nothing else, the failure of this final plan for an extensive military academy evidences once again the intense partisan conflict over the nature of the military establishment, between the Federalists and the Republicans, and amongst the internal factions of each party as well.

Despite this partisan struggle, both internally and externally, academy proposals under Adams gasped for breath once more when Secretary of War Dexter proposed a plan to take advantage of the Corps of Artillerists and Engineers for the training of

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Kohn, 257, 259.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 259.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 273.

cadets, as authorized by Congress.²⁵⁹ However, various circumstances foiled these aspirations, until, "On his last full day in office, Adams filled the vacancies in the cadet ranks . . . But this effort, in the midst of any orgy of appointments made in the last days of the administration, was more an act of political opportunism than a compliment to those earlier plans."²⁶⁰ Around the time of these last efforts to provide an academy in 1800, "diplomatic negotiations ended the trouble with France. All of the temporary forces were discharged; nearly 3,400 men and officers were dismissed and the Army reduced . . . After four years of frenzied increases, the Army was at the exact authorized strength with which it had started."²⁶¹ Another administration had come and gone, with an official and extensive national military academy still only existing in the minds of its proponents.

Contrary to the expected course, Jefferson's new Republican administration moved with surprising vigor towards the establishment of a national military academy. As a result of the reorganization and drawdown of the army in 1800, Col. Henry Burbeck was transferred "to become Chief of Artillery in command of both regiments of Artillerists and Engineers" and later "assumed command of all troops on the eastern seaboard."²⁶² This position, and Burbeck's "close relationship" with new Secretary of

²⁵⁹ Crackel, 55-6. Adams's agreement with this plan of Dexter's is evident in his letter to Dexter on July 25, 1800, where he states that, "I am very much pleased with your plan for executing the existing laws for the instruction of the artillerists and engineers. I am very ready to appoint the whole number of cadets provided by law, namely two for each company, or sixty-four in all, as soon as proper candidates present themselves; and the whole of the four teachers and two engineers, if you are prepared to recommend suitable persons" (65). He also urges Dexter to "take the earliest measure for providing all the necessary books, instruments, and apparatus, authorized by law, for the use and benefit of the artillerists and engineers" (65). *The Works of John Adams*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, Vol. IX. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1854), 65-6.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁶¹ Pappas, 15.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

War Dearborn, "enabled him to resubmit recommendations he had made to the previous secretary concerning the organization of the two regiments of Artillerists and Engineers."²⁶³ In these remarks, Burbeck proposed the "establishment of a military academy 'for instructing the arts of gunnery, fortification, pyrotechny, and everything relative to the art of war.'"²⁶⁴ Likewise, as Crackel points out, "Within a month the decision had been made to establish a military academy."²⁶⁵ On May 12, 1801, Dearborn wrote to a Brigadier General Wilkinson: "The President having decided in favor of the immediate establishment of a military school at West Point . . ." and enumerated several instructions.²⁶⁶ The same day, Dearborn also wrote Captain George Fleming that, "It being in contemplation to establish a Military School, at West Point, immediately, you will please to furnish me with a statement of the number, situation and state of repair of the public buildings, at that post, and how they are at present occupied."²⁶⁷ "Less than four months after the administration had taken office," Crackel proclaims, "Dearborn ordered the cadets to West Point."²⁶⁸ Finally, the work of two previous administrations, and countless men before them came to fruition, as Congress passed on March 16, 1802, "the organic act of the United States Military Academy."²⁶⁹ As part of an "Act fixing the military peace establishment of the United States," the President was "authorized and

²⁶³ Ibid., 15-6.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Crackel, 58.

²⁶⁶ "Henry Dearborn to Brig. Gen. Wilkinson," 12 May, 1801, *War Department Letters Relating to the U.S. Military Academy, 1801-1838*, selected by Edward S. Holden, October 1903, from the Archives Division of the United States Military Academy Library, West Point, New York.

²⁶⁷ "Henry Dearborn to Captain George Fleming," 12 May, 1801, *War Department Letters*. This letter also included the need for houses for "a Teacher of Mathematics, and one for a Practical Teacher of Gunnery, &c., and also rooms for twenty to thirty pupils."

²⁶⁸ Crackel, 59.

²⁶⁹ Forman, 18.

empowered . . . to organize and establish and corps of engineers."²⁷⁰ "That the said corps when so organized, shall be stationed as West Point, in the State of New York, and shall constitute a military academy."²⁷¹ The dream of an academy thus became a reality. The question remains though, whose dream did it fulfill?

Before addressing the question of whose conception of a military academy West Point in 1802 fulfilled, it bears discussion that, unlike the plight of the national military academy concept, the national university notion received little attention from the end of Washington's Presidency through the beginning of Jefferson's Republican administration. As Martin Claussen asserts, "the subject of a university in the new capital city was next considered by Congress in 1803, after a memorial had been presented to it by Samuel Blodget."²⁷² In the intervening years, John Adams "was in hearty sympathy with the project" of a national university, but "did not specifically recommend it to Congress."²⁷³ Following Adams, "Jefferson twice recommended the university to the attention of Congress, but appears to have developed some doubts of its constitutionality."²⁷⁴ Many other presidents, lawmakers, and private citizens have labored to establish such an institution since this early stage in the life of the republic. According to Edgar Wesley, "The movement has failed because of popular inertia, because of some slight but influential opposition, and because of the numerous

²⁷⁰ "An Act fixing the military peace establishment of the United States," March 16, 1802, *Laws of Congress Relative to West Point*, 5.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6. The Act also provided that, at maximum numbers, the corps could consist of sixteen officers and four cadets (5-6). In addition, the engineers and cadets of the corps were "subject, at all times, to do duty in such places, and on such service, as the President of the United States shall direct" (6). The Secretary of War was authorized as well "at the public expense, under such regulations as shall be directed by the President of the United States, to procure the necessary books, implements and apparatus for the use and benefit of the said institution" (6).

²⁷² Claussen, 9.

²⁷³ Wesley, 8.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

substitutes that have been set up to accomplish one or more of the aims of the university.”²⁷⁵ Yet, it is in the context of Wesley’s third reason that the national university has often been tied to West Point, suggesting that elements of one conception of this institution live on in the nation’s military academies. Here, the previous question with the military academy applies—is it Washington’s, Jefferson’s, or possibly even another figure’s conception of this institution that lives in West Point?

In the quest to explain why Jefferson founded West Point, an institution that would seemingly contradict several of his core political beliefs, many scholars have pointed to the influence of national university sentiments as the lynchpin for both Jefferson himself, and Congress. Of these scholarly interpretations, Stephen Ambrose’s work evidences one of the strongest views on the influence the national university concept had in the founding of the military academy. Ambrose cites the “chief reason” for Congressional inaction during Adams’s administration as “an unspoken but nevertheless real fear of a trained body of officers.”²⁷⁶ He adds that, “A further impetus was needed before Congress would agree to a military academy. It came from the desire for an American institution concentrating on the sciences.”²⁷⁷ Ambrose mentions that, “the idea of a national university which could help create a national sentiment and provide a practical education for future public servants was championed by Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and indeed every President before Andrew Jackson.”²⁷⁸ Additionally, “Washington thought a national university would foster able public servants by freeing its

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 22.

²⁷⁶ Ambrose, 15.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 17. Richard Kohn, in *Eagle and Sword*, presents this same idea as one of the possibilities for Jefferson’s action, stating that, “Perhaps he wished to found a national university which would avoid the traditional emphasis on classics and become the model for education in science, foreign languages, and other subjects of practical use” (303).

students from the prejudices of sectionalism.”²⁷⁹ While the later sentiment is certainly true, as has been shown, the former statement emphasizing a “practical” education is misleading in regard to Washington. Of the two national educational institutions, Washington saw the military academy as much more “practical” in nature, at least in the context of a technical education that Ambrose connects with the national university. Ambrose’s “practical education” focus concerning the national university is evident in his assertion that, “When Jefferson assumed the Presidency in 1801, he was eager to found a national institution that would eliminate the classics, add the sciences, and produce graduates who would use their knowledge for the benefit of society.”²⁸⁰ He continues that, “Within this framework, Jefferson realized that a military academy had the best chance of success. Those sectionalists opposed to a national university might be persuaded to support a national military academy, while the scholastics would be more willing to accept an empiricist academy than they would an empiricist university.”²⁸¹ In the end, Ambrose asserts that this combination resulted in the 1802 law for the establishment of a military academy based within the Corps of Engineers, an outcome that “did not meet the recommendations or hopes of Knox, Washington, Tousard, Hamilton, or Jefferson.”²⁸² It did, however, “recognize the need for a national academy, controlled by civilians, that would emphasize science and produce trained officers.”²⁸³ Yet, not every scholar takes the same premise as Ambrose on this topic.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 18.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid., 22.

²⁸³ Ibid.

The strongest criticism of the view held by many scholars, and evidenced here by Ambrose's thesis, resides in Theodore Crackel's work, *Mr. Jefferson's Army*. Crackel emphatically argues that, "Far from being a school of science or engineering, the academy was created to provide Republican sons with the fundamental skills they would need to officer Mr. Jefferson's army."²⁸⁴ In making this argument, Crackel attempts to debunk the traditional view of Jefferson as anti-military by asserting that, "Jefferson never doubted the need for some regular forces. He had long believed the regulars were essential on the nation's far-flung frontiers, and conceded their utility where skills such as those of artillerists and engineers were required."²⁸⁵ Therefore, Jefferson's concern was not with disbanding the military, but "to mold an army that would threaten neither the new Republican regime, nor the republic itself."²⁸⁶ This notion appears consistent with Robert Johnstone's assertion that, "If there is a unifying theme in Jefferson's public career, it is this effort to mold the nation's political institutions in such a way as to bring them into conformity with the ideals of the American experiment in self-government."²⁸⁷ To rebut Ambrose, Crackel proclaims that West Point, in its inception, evidenced a "very limited extent of either scientific or engineering instruction."²⁸⁸ In addition, "formal engineering training was neither the sole nor the primary goal, nor was it even attempted until nearly a decade after Jefferson left office," for "not until after Sylvanus Thayer

²⁸⁴ Crackel, 73.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 14. Central to Crackel's argument is the narrative of how the army under Adams's Federalist administration "had been set loose on the people in 1799 and, though reduced in 1800, an army which many Republicans had feared would be used against them to deny them the fruits of their victory at the polls" (13). These details are found in Chapter 1, "Mr. Hamilton's Army, 1798-1800."

²⁸⁷ Johnstone, 43.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

became Superintendent in 1817” were “truly qualified engineers” produced.²⁸⁹ Further, “the cadets appointed by Jefferson were almost uniformly given artillery rather than engineer warrants.”²⁹⁰ Even this thesis though, with the new evidence it brings to the table, is not without its holes.

There is no reason to doubt Crackel’s argument of how Jefferson and the Republicans disagreed with the military establishment as it was administered and conducted during the Quasi-War with France and the period of the Alien and Sedition Acts. Yet, in regards to Jefferson’s actions in office, it should be noted that he also advocated and led “a government whose arbitrary powers would be eliminated, whose lawful powers would be restricted by written rules, and whose scope would be narrowed within the limits imposed by necessity and a written constitution.”²⁹¹ Likewise, it should follow that a military formed under these considerations would indeed look much different from the broader Federalist perspective of national government, and thereby executive, authority. However, as Richard Kohn points out, “Twenty years after the winning of independence, even though the Jeffersonians had acceded to power, the United States possessed almost exactly the establishment nationalists advocated in 1783.”²⁹² This outcome leads one to believe that at least the moderate Federalist and Republican conceptions of an appropriate republican military establishment are closer than commonly acknowledged. Either that, or the practical military needs under Jefferson’s administration had much in common with those Washington and other Federalists politicians faced during the early and mid-1790s. While Crackel’s thesis, and

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 61.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 45.

²⁹² Kohn, 286.

the greater partisan aspects of this issue are significant, they may have less consequence in regards to West Point's founding than is first expected.

Towards the same end, in his paper, "The Establishment of the United States Military Academy: The Motives and Objectives of President Jefferson," then West Point History Professor, Lieutenant Colonel James Rainey, states that while "Crackel's argument that Jefferson sought to republicanize the officer corps by 'seeding' it with Republicans is persuasive," it falls short in evidence to claim that "political affiliation" was a central concern in gaining an academy appointment under Jefferson.²⁹³ Among its other weaknesses, Rainey points out that, "If West Point was to have been the Republican grassroots seedbed of the officer corps . . . then one logically could expect that the positive nature of Republican politics and the detrimental effects of Federalist politics would have been discussed vigorously by Academy cadets and maybe even taught by the faculty," but there is no substantial evidence to support this conclusion.²⁹⁴ Much the same, Rainey mentions in his footnotes that, "Pappas [author of the most recent major work on West Point's history] also argues that Jefferson acted to establish the military academy at West Point as a national university disguised as a military academy. And, in a discussion with Pappas in January 1989, he stated that he was not willing to exclude the fact that Jefferson's decision also may have been influenced by his ideas on science, civil

²⁹³ Lieutenant Colonel James W. Rainey, "The Establishment of the United States Military Academy: The Motives and Objectives of President Jefferson," March 21, 1989, paper from the Special Collections Division of the United States Military Academy Library, West Point, New York, 19, 21. Lieutenant Colonel Rainey has since retired.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 22.

engineering, politics, and education.”²⁹⁵ Indeed, George Pappas’s more recent research adds additional depth to the search for Jefferson’s motive in establishing West Point.

In his work, Pappas presents a relatively new interpretation of West Point’s founding by focusing particular attention on the developments in officer education leading up to Jefferson’s administration. Towards this end, Pappas points to the memoirs of the Henry Burbeck, and Joseph Swift (the first official graduate in 1802) for evidence that, “the Military Academy founded in 1802 was a continuation of the school existing at the time.”²⁹⁶ Additionally, Burbeck’s “belief that Artillery and Engineer officers required scientific and technical training not available in colleges of that period was the basis for establishing the small academy for cadets of the two regiments of Artillerists and Engineers.”²⁹⁷ “The existence of this academy, small as it was, made it easier to convince the President that a national military academy was a vital necessity for a professional army.”²⁹⁸ In the end though, Pappas asserts that, “Although there is every justification to assert that a military academy did exist before 1802, there is no reason to dispute the observance of March 16, 1802 . . . for it was then that Congress for the first time authorized the establishment of *the* United States Military Academy.”²⁹⁹ The school before that was “never authorized by Congress. It was a school organized for the sole purpose of preparing cadets for service as officers of the regiments of Artillerists and Engineers.”³⁰⁰ Still, Pappas’s work on the influence of Burbeck and the use of the earlier school points to a more practical rationale for Jefferson’s decision. Sidney Forman

²⁹⁵ Rainey, footnote number 70, 4.

²⁹⁶ Pappas, 15, 21.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

supports considerations of a similar nature by proclaiming that, "When Thomas Jefferson took office as President in the spring of 1801, he was faced with problems of foreign policy, with the Mediterranean pirates, and with rumors of the restoration of French authority in Louisiana; and he took practical steps which led to the establishment of the United States Military Academy."³⁰¹

It is in this same context of practicality that Rainey finally concludes his investigation into Jefferson's motives. He concedes that, "Jefferson simply is too complex an individual for historians to be able to explain his actions in monocausal terms. His establishment of the United States Military Academy can be understood only in the context of this views on many issues, among them science, education, partisan politics, military affairs, fear of Federalist philosophy and activities, and republicanism."³⁰² He then states his agreement with Larry Donnithorne, then Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Strategic Planning:

West Point's purposes resist easy summarization. Probably we should not try to compose a single capstone statement of West Point's purposes because the richness and complexity of the historical record resists being captured so succinctly. It is these many facets of the jewel that give the history of West Point's founding its provocative sparkle.³⁰³

To end, Rainey stands in agreement with another scholar, Henry F. May's "explanation of many of Jefferson's actions: We can believe that he did what he thought the times

³⁰¹ Forman, 17.

³⁰² Rainey, 47-8.

³⁰³ Larry P. Donnithorne, "The Founding of West Point: Seeking the National Purpose in the First Federal Initiative in Higher Education," January 7, 1986, paper from the United States Military Academy Historian, West Point, New York, 50. The version quoted here is directly from the author's copy of Donnithorne's paper. The wording differs slightly from the version that Rainey quotes on page 48 of his work. Colonel Donnithorne has since retired.

required.”³⁰⁴ Indeed, Rainey’s conclusion points not only to Kohn’s statement that Jefferson’s “motives have never been convincingly explained,” but that the key most likely resides in the practicality of Jefferson’s actions given his circumstances.³⁰⁵ In many ways, Washington’s rationale for these two institutions of national education, especially an extensive military academy, share this same concern for practical action to meet the events and needs of the day.

Regardless of Jefferson’s exact motive, which will probably never be known, both views of West Point’s founding present important implications concerning the legacy and possible influence of Washington’s conceptions of the national military academy and national university. If, on the one hand, Crackel is right in some, if not all regards, there remains a disturbing implication to his thesis—that Jefferson, or even the Federalists before him, would desire to create or mold a partisan army. Even by partially accepting Crackel’s thesis, Jefferson’s motive was more likely along the lines of molding a military that was “friendly” to the administration in office, which at the time happened to be Republican. Underlying Crackel’s thesis though, is the idea that an army created with Federalist motives could not be friendly to any administration of true republican government, which is an exaggeration as well.³⁰⁶ Once again, the bitter divide over which party most accurately represented the heart of the American regime is evident. Nevertheless, while Washington would completely agree with the notion of an army in “the hands of the people . . . an army with its leadership drawn from every segment of the

³⁰⁴ Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 212, quoted in Rainey, 48.

³⁰⁵ Kohn, 303.

³⁰⁶ The fact remains that there was no military coup or takeover when Jefferson and his administration took office.

citizenry and every corner of the nation,” he certainly would not have entertained the idea of the military as a partisan force.³⁰⁷ As historian Don Higginbotham proclaims, Washington’s “respect for and understanding of superior authority—that is to say, civil control of the military *and all that it meant*—became his most admirable soldierly quality in the War of Independence and his foremost contribution to the American military tradition.”³⁰⁸ Indeed, American military officers take an oath to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States,” not a specific political party or administration.³⁰⁹ Thus, the portion of Washington’s legacy regarding civil-military relations holds crucial implications for military education, as will be discussed shortly.

On the other hand, if Ambrose is right in his more traditional view, based on a combination of the military academy and national university concepts as technical institutions, then some unique implications result as well. The key inference here is the difference between Washington and Jefferson’s conceptions on the role and curriculum of the national university, with the former being more liberal and the later being more technical. As has been shown by Washington’s writings and addresses, Goode’s assessment of “Washington’s own inclinations” being “all favorable to the progress of science” with his conception of the national university’s role is misleading.³¹⁰ While there is no reason to doubt the fact that Washington thought science should be taught at such an institution, it was not his primary motive. His motive was to make citizens—citizens with a common knowledge of their countrymen, their government, and their

³⁰⁷ Crackel, 183.

³⁰⁸ Don Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), 38.

³⁰⁹ Col. Jeffrey C. Benton (Ret.), *Air Force Officer’s Guide*, 31st Ed. (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1996), 3.

³¹⁰ Goode, 62-3.

responsibilities. Washington saw an extensive liberal education in a national university as the means to this end. Jefferson, to the contrary, proclaimed that, "a public institution can alone supply those sciences which, though rarely called for, are yet necessary to complete the circle, all the parts of which contribute to the improvement of the country and some of them to its preservation."³¹¹ Whereas Washington and Jefferson have the same motive of preservation of the nation, it appears that Jefferson placed more importance on the contributions of science to its development as the answer, with Washington focusing on an educated and united citizenry to reach this goal. However, this assertion does not disregard that fact that Jefferson viewed liberal or classical education as important in the development of citizens.³¹² The difference is that Jefferson saw such an education coming earlier in life, and thus was not necessary in the context of a national university.³¹³ Therefore, if Jefferson's conception of a national university did make the foundation of West Point possible, then that would explain why the military academies have traditionally remained engineering schools. It would follow then, that a military academy founded under Washington's conception of a national university, based on liberal education, would appear to be much different from Jefferson's technical education notion. Just what West Point would look like when combined with Washington's notion of the national university is a more relevant question for today than would first appear.

³¹¹ Henry Adams, *The Life of Albert Gallatin*, 349-50; quoting a Thomas Jefferson message in 1806; all quoted in Goode, 92-3.

³¹² A. Whitney Griswold, *Liberal Education and the Democratic Ideal, and Other Essays* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 1-6.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Despite their obvious differences, both in Washington's eyes and others, the national military academy and national university proposals both share important similarities. For Washington, both institutions would contribute to the formulation of competent and knowledgeable republican citizens. One, of course, would fulfill this goal by means of training citizens in the practical "art of war" for defense of the nation. While such an institution would certainly teach the technical skills of artillery and engineering, the more general knowledge of a soldier and officer was most likely considered as well. The other institution, the national university, would provide citizens with the education necessary to constructively participate and understand the government under which they freely lived. Washington saw both as disseminating knowledge throughout the nation. Moreover, as youth were educated in such national institutions from every corner of the republic, not only would the education, no matter what type, filter down to all citizens, but regional divide would crumble. Most importantly, both institutions signify means to the end of a prosperous and persevering Union. Both educate citizens. They are, in many ways, Washington's very practical solutions to the problems of the infant republic that he experienced in his time and predicted for the ages to come. At the same time, they represent Washington's desire to imbibe Americans with a uniquely republican and *national* character. They converge in the common purpose to provide for the health, prosperity, and preservation of an infant nation. They converge in the legacy of service Washington gave to his country. For as William Allen observes of Washington, "it is

clear that the idea of a strong American Union motivated him throughout the thirty years (1769-1799) of active citizenship in which he guided his countrymen."³¹⁴

It is in regards to other's views of the relationship between these two institutions that implications to national education, and specifically military education, arise. For in accepting the notion that Jefferson's conception of a national university did play a role in West Point's inception, however large that role may be, a great contrast is evident between a military academy founded under Jefferson's national university ideal and Washington's. West Point, as established under Jefferson, was first of all not extensive in scope, as Washington most likely, and his Federalist peers most definitely, envisioned such an institution. Secondly, the established military academy focused on technical training. While this scientific emphasis coincides with Jefferson's national university vision, it does not fit the extensive liberal education model that Washington proposed for the same institution. However, the argument can be made that while Washington lost the battle, he may be winning the war.

Before turning to the implications that Washington's sentiments on these two institutions of national education hold for this day and age, it is important to note the limits of this study. While Washington's letters and addresses, taken in context with the circumstances of the day, give a great deal of insight into his purposes for each institution, questions still remain. How significant was the training of artilleryists and engineers in a military academy to Washington? Did he completely agree with the proposals of his fellow officers, such as Steuben, Knox, and Hamilton concerning the curriculum and administration of an extensive academy? How great a role did

³¹⁴ William B. Allen, "George Washington and the Standing Oak," *Patriot Sage*, 106-7.

Washington see for education in the sciences at a national university? Did he design this university to solely train leaders for the new Union? Perhaps other correspondence and writings can shed light on these remaining questions. Additionally, in order to make a more extensive comparison between Washington and Jefferson's conceptions of the military academy and national university, and hence their interaction and relation, an in-depth analysis of Jefferson's views regarding education and the military establishment are necessary. Despite these questions, and many others, that remain unanswered, the models of Washington's two educational institutions for an infant nation presented in this work bear consideration for a much more aged nation today.

As stated earlier, the United States today lacks a true national university, at least in the way George Washington envisioned. Our nation does, however, support extensive academies for the military services. After West Point's inception in 1802, the Naval Academy came into existence in 1845.³¹⁵ Over a hundred years later, the Air Force Academy was founded in 1954.³¹⁶ As James Lovell points out though, West Point "served as the model" for both of the latter institutions.³¹⁷ Thus, the nature of the founding of West Point, its motives and design, bears significant relevance to a major portion of the initial officer education for the nation's military services today. This is in part why the search for the original purpose of West Point is such a popular research objective. In Larry Donnithorne's research of this question though, two notable considerations arise. The first is that, "it is clear that West Point was intended to provide

³¹⁵ James P. Lovell, *Neither Athens Nor Sparta?: The American Service Academies in Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 27.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 61. These three academies are equivalent in size and, for the most part, mission. Therefore, the Coast Guard Academy and Merchant Marine Academy are not discussed in the same light.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

a technical, scientific education that contrasted with the classical education of the day.”³¹⁸ 82

Here again is evidence of the influence of Jefferson’s national university conception on West Point’s nature. Second, “the educational benefits of West Point were not intended by the nation to be construed narrowly, as accruing to the army only. Rather, those benefits were to be construed broadly, as accruing to the nation in all its aspects.”³¹⁹

Donnithorne continues:

It was an acceptable purpose, for at least a majority, to educate young persons who might leave the army after a few years. It was acceptable because it yielded the nation broad benefits—it yielded productive citizens for non-military roles in government and in private, civil life; it enhanced the militia and the reliance that the nation could place upon it; it reduced the grip that wealth held on access to higher education; it aided the worthy sons of the poor and promoted a meritocracy; and it made an army a safer instrument of a non-military government.³²⁰

In this view, West Point’s purpose is in many ways consistent with Washington’s broad goals for both a military academy and a national university—goals to educate citizens and disperse them back throughout the nation, uniting the people in a prosperous and enduring Union. However, this Washingtonian aspect of the purpose of West Point, and hence the other service academies, is not confined to Donnithorne’s work alone.

Along the same lines as the view evidenced above, “Educating Army Leaders for the 21st Century,” a recent statement of West Point’s educational model, includes the following as “the essential mission of the United States Military Academy”:

To educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character who is committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country. Furthermore, these values are exemplified by each graduate’s

³¹⁸ Donnithorne, 49.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid., 49-50.

commitment to a career in the United States Army and a lifetime of service to the nation.³²¹

Such a statement, I propose, reveals a great deal more of Washington's conception of a national university, and hence citizen education, than Jefferson's national university notion that is linked with the military academy's founding. This focus on "a lifetime of service to the nation" is in many ways similar to Washington's words to his soldiers, upon resigning as the "Commander in chief," that, "it is earnestly recommended to all the Troops that with strong attachments to the Union, they should carry with them into civil society the most conciliating dispositions; and that they should prove themselves not less virtuous and useful as Citizens, then they have been persevering and victorious as Soldiers."³²² Military academies that seek to train not only officers, but also "virtuous and useful" citizens, therefore, evidence first and foremost the legacy of Washington. In addition, the argument can also be made that academy education has become more liberal in scope, especially in the later half of the twentieth century.³²³ However, the curriculum still remains true to its technical roots, as evidenced by the core curriculum emphasis on engineering. If nothing else, academy education now occupies the middle ground of "educating and training the 'whole man,'" a situation that proponents on both ends can accept as satisfactory.³²⁴

The second implication that Washington's conceptions of a national military academy and a national university have for today stems more from George Washington

³²¹ Brigadier General Fletcher M. Lamkin, Dean, USMA, "Educating Army Leaders for the 21st Century." <http://www.dean.usma.edu/EducatingArmyLeaders/text.htm>, April 11, 2000, 2. Brig. Gen. Lamkin is now a former Dean due to his recent retirement.

³²² George Washington, "Farewell Orders to the Armies of the United States," November 2, 1783, *GW*, 268.

³²³ Lovell, 6-7.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

himself than the models for his proposed educational institutions. It is in Washington's character and legacy that a cure, or at least perspective, for a current problem in American civil-military relations is evident. Arguably the greatest problem of American civil-military relations today is that of a "gap" between the military and the society it serves. Thomas Ricks, in his book on Marine Corps boot camp, declares that, "The idea of a gap between the military and American society is hardly new."³²⁵ However, as a result of "changes both in society and in the military, that 'divorce' or 'gap' appears to be more severe now than it frequently was in the past."³²⁶ Ricks cites two reasons for the increased gap: "First, after twenty years without conscription, the ignorance of American elites about the military has deepened. Second, with the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has entered into historically unexplored territory . . . for the first time in history, the nation is maintaining a large military establishment during peacetime."³²⁷ In his article on post-Cold War civil-military relations, John Allen Williams also identifies "Political scientist Ole Holsti" as having "confirmed and extended Ricks' analysis" by documenting through survey research a politicization of the officer corps.³²⁸ At the same time though, Williams adds that, "The degree and significance of this gap are open to debate. It may be simply a curious artifact of different socialization processes, but it could also mark a fundamental 'fault line' that has implications for the nature of military service, military effectiveness, and the ability of civilian society to control the military

³²⁵ Thomas E. Ricks, *Making the Corps* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 274.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 274-5. The last reason is based on the stated assumption that the "Cold War is indeed considered to be a kind of war" (275).

³²⁸ John Allen Williams, "The Military and Modern Society: Civilian-Military Relations in Post-Cold War America," *World and I* 14, no. 9 (Sept. 1999): 306, (News World Communications, 1999), 3. Article from Infotrac Internet Search. This politicization is towards a conservative Republican partisan outlook, which Ricks notes as well on pages 279-80.

that defends it.”³²⁹ While the latter sentiment is arguably an exaggeration in our republican regime, “There is a danger if society and the military that protects it become too dissociated with each other.”³³⁰ This same danger is one that George Washington knew all too well—one we would do well to reflect upon.

On a Saturday morning, in March of 1783, George Washington walked into a meeting he had called with his officers, at Newburgh, New York, to discuss the growing sentiment and threat of rebellion many officers had voiced to Congress over their lack of pay during, and now after, the war.³³¹ Following a denouncement of the officer’s position, Washington pulled from his pocket a letter from a Congressman, as a sign of the legislative body’s “good intentions.”³³² “After reading the first paragraph, Washington paused, fumbled in his vest, found the spectacles, . . . and put them on. Unaffectedly, the tall general murmured that he had grown gray in the service of his country, and now found himself growing blind. The assemblage was stunned.”³³³ More importantly, the threat to America’s new won freedom was vanquished. Washington would repeat the equivalent of this act two more times: the first as he stepped down as commander in chief of the Continental Army after the Revolution, and the second in a civilian capacity as he chose not to run for a third term as president. It is largely because of the two former actions that scholars Bruce Thornton and Victor Hanson can declare that, “Washington’s military model then, was Cincinnatus, not Caesar; and his real legacy as a general was not so much his military accomplishments . . . but rather his demeanor and

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Kohn, 31.

³³² Ibid., 32.

³³³ Ibid.

attitude toward civilian command in a republic.”³³⁴ This same concern for the health of the republic is no less evident in his final retirement from public service, even as a civilian.

In a letter to John Banister on April 21, 1778, from the despair of the winter encampment in Valley Forge, Washington wrote that, “We should all be considered, Congress, Army, &c. as one people, embarked in one Cause, in one interest; acting on the same principle and to the same End.”³³⁵ Even though he wrote these words in the context of the Revolutionary War, there is perhaps no greater summary of Washington’s vision for America. His proposals for a national military academy and a national university were part of the means to this “same End.” Washington’s saw that “End” as a united and prospering people—a people of *national* character. In an age of a supposed values “gap” between the military and society, is there not a better legacy to turn to than Washington’s? For what can keep a republic safer, than officers committed to defend it against oppression, and preserve it by remaining humble citizens? A military academy in a republic can have no more important lesson to teach, as I am sure Washington would agree.

³³⁴ Bruce S. Thornton and Victor Davis Hanson, “‘The Western Cincinnatus’: Washington as Farmer and Soldier,” *Patriot Sage*, 59.

³³⁵ George Washington, “To John Banister,” April 21, 1778, *GW*, 102.

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